

## Interview with Mr. John R. Ratigan

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN RATIGAN

Interviewed by: Ray Ewing

Initial interview date: August 17, 2007

Copyright 2008 ADST

*Q: This interview with John Ratigan is being conducted under the foreign affairs oral history program sponsored by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Ray Ewing. John I am really pleased to be here today. We have known each other before. Why don't we start by sort of figuring out how you got into the foreign service. You were born in Buffalo, New York. Is that what got you interested in the foreign service?*

RATIGAN: The Buffalo aspect came later when I was posted in Toronto really, but I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. What got me into the foreign service really I think was when I was still in school I met this charming young lady that I decided I wanted to marry. She wasn't really sure whether she wanted to marry me or go into the Peace Corps. I decided to solve that problem by marrying her and going into the Peace Corps right after we both finished school.

*Q: You went into the Peace Corps as well.*

RATIGAN: We both were Peace Corps volunteers. Actually our parents said that we couldn't get married until we had a job. So I went down to Washington and basically hung around people's desks at the Peace Corps for about two or three weeks until we were offered positions as volunteers in Tanzania. So we had to hurry back up to Massachusetts,

## Library of Congress

get married in about two or three months, take a one week honeymoon, and report for Peace Corps training at Columbia Teacher's College in New York City. We spent two terrific years in Tanzania teaching at a secondary school on the western shores of Lake Victoria. It was really a terrific experience. I was very tempted to stay for a third year. We had offers to be teachers at a teacher training school in another part of Tanzania. But I was a lawyer, and I thought I have got to get back and start practicing law if I am ever going to be serious about this. So I did and practiced for about five or six years. Then one day after lunch I walked over to the post office and saw an ad for the foreign service exam. I think I had like two or three days to get my application in. I got it in and took the test and anyway that is how I joined the foreign service.

*Q: OK, well that is a good capsule summary of that, but why don't we back up just a little bit. You went to Dartmouth?*

RATIGAN: I did.

*Q: What was your field of study there, your major?*

RATIGAN: I started off as an English major and then I got to the point where I had taken a number of English courses and then had to go into and read authors I really didn't want to read that much. So I changed to history and tried to cram a history major into about one year worth of study. I managed to do that and graduated in 1961.

*Q: And after that you went to law school?*

RATIGAN: I went to law school at Yale and finished there in 1964. Among my illustrious classmates were Jerry Brown, the former governor of California, and Gary Hart, the senator and presidential candidate. Those are the two that I remember right now.

*Q: Were you there with Hillary Rodman?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: She came around shortly after I graduated.

*Q: And then Bill Clinton.*

RATIGAN: Bill Clinton, right.

*Q: At what point did you meet Barbara Anderson who you married before going to Tanzania?*

RATIGAN: In my first year there at law school. We met — actually I picked her up on the train. Something I had never done before, but she was carrying a suitcase to get on a train to go up to Dartmouth. I guess she had a date with somebody up there. I was getting on the same train and offered to carry the suitcase which was very light. We struck up a conversation. One thing led to another and we got married shortly after getting our Peace Corps assignments, in the fall of 1964.

*Q: She graduated from or was a student at...*

RATIGAN: She graduated from Mount Holyoke in 1964.

*Q: What sort of, you were secondary school teachers in Tanzania. What did you teach?*

RATIGAN: I taught history which was really civics, and I also taught English for two years. The idea was that you would take an English class for two years. I took mine for the junior and senior years of high school to prepare them for the Cambridge examinations which they were taking and may still be taking in Tanzania, I don't know. The Cambridge examinations were the key to advancement in British East Africa, that is, how well you did on the O level Cambridge exam. So we did that. I also taught as I say civics to sophomores, African students. This was right after independence. Tanzania became independent in 1964 I believe or '63. It was kind of interesting in that when we Peace Corps volunteers came into Dar Es Salaam for our meeting with the education ministry

## Library of Congress

people and the giving out of assignments to schools and so forth, we met the English colonial expatriate teachers who were packing out and going back to England after independence, and here we were green as grass American college graduates to take their places. I can't imagine, well I can imagine what they thought actually. Then we went to these various schools. I started to say I think I may have been the last white man to teach civics in Tanzania. We were 800 miles from the capital. People didn't pay much attention to the school that we were in, but obviously Civics was a sensitive subject, how laws were made, how governments govern, and it was a field that was being quickly Africanized at that point. I was also asked at one point by the local government to be an election monitor at the time of a nationwide election. I sat in one of the polling stations and observed the process of people coming to vote, etc. So that was fun.

*Q: Were you the first contingent of Peace Corps volunteers in Tanzania.*

RATIGAN: We were the seventh, actually: our class was called Tanzania Seven. I think Tanzania was one of the earliest countries to receive Peace Corps volunteers. But ours was the first group of secondary school teachers.

*Q: Even before independence.*

RATIGAN: I think some Volunteers may have come before Independence, although, I am not sure. Because we were the first in secondary schools, we were trained at Columbia Teachers College. Columbia had also been providing teachers in a program called Teachers for East Africa. I think Teachers for East Africa was kind of phased out as the Peace Corps was phased in. We had the same trainers. My wife and I learned some Swahili at Columbia before we left, an hour or so a day so that we had something of a working knowledge by the time we got there.

*Q: How long was the training at Columbia?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Three months. We took off I think right after Christmas on a plane to I think maybe London. We both had friends come down to JFK to see us off. It seemed like a very normal thing somehow to be heading off to Africa. I am not sure why.. Q: And then you were in Dar Es Salaam for more training.

RATIGAN: We were. There was sort of a boy scout camp outside of Dar Es Salaam, and we all went out there, kind of a very appropriate place for us to be, and got oriented and met with Tanzanian officials, by now a fully Africanized ministry of education. Our Peace Corps mentors were a little unhappy with us because when we got assigned to Musoma or Bukoba or Mwanza or whatever, the first thing everybody would say is where is that? It didn't make the trainers look good, so the Peace Corps people immediately decided that from now on the training was going to include map study.

*Q: A little geography. And you went to Bukoba.*

RATIGAN: We went to Bukoba, a little town of about 5,000 people on the western shore of Lake Victoria. Bukoba later gained some degree of fame by being one of the jumping off points when the Tanzanian forces went into Uganda to try and liberate Uganda from Idi Amin. Idi Amin retaliated by bombing Bukoba. The story we later read in the western press was they bombed the market place that you know was full of oranges, vegetables, nothing strategic there.

*Q: Bukoba as you said is 800 miles from the coast, kind of remote. Were you the only Peace Corps volunteers in the school together?*

RATIGAN: No, actually there was another member of our Tanzania 7 class who was also there. Bruce Jones was a chemistry teacher, chemistry and physics I guess. We had trained with him in New York. And then there were other Peace Corps programs in the area. We had three guy, two engineers and a hydrologist, you know a water management guy, who lived in the town. Our school was located about five miles outside of town. We

## Library of Congress

had various Peace Corps primary school teachers, probably three or four of them who were out in more rural areas and who came into town fairly regularly. So we were a sort of hard core group of about six or seven people. Two of the volunteers ultimately ended up getting married, one of the primary school teachers and one of the engineers, and you know, we are still in touch with them. They went back actually a year or two ago.

*Q: Just to visit?*

RATIGAN: Yes, just to see what it was like.

*Q: Have you ever been back?*

RATIGAN: No, and we are thinking about going now but an AID friend of mine who was a teacher for East Africa at the same Bukoba secondary school that we were at, I met him in Washington some time later. He had been back and took his kids back with him, and he said it was very depressing. . So we put it off for a long time. We just said some other time. This was at a time when Tanzania was going through a very difficult economic time. They were building the railroad into Zambia with the Chinese. He said just about the only thing on the store shelves was Chinese jams and jellies. It was a tough time, in the 1980s I think.

*Q: You taught in English or Swahili?*

RATIGAN: I taught in English. The kids started learning English in fifth or sixth grade, and so they were reasonably proficient by the time they got to high school. The medium of instruction changed from Swahili to English in high school. That was a major transition. The school itself was on a nice, self-contained campus. We lived in a three bedroom house actually that was built new that we moved into shortly after we arrived. It had hot and cold running water. We had a cook. We didn't really have a gardener, but we had a guy who came around and did stuff.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Did you have a night watchman?*

RATIGAN: No, it was the staff, the faculty that were basically the night watchmen. Everyone had a rotating duty to visit each of the dorms about 10 o'clock at night, to do bed-check and see if there were any problems.

*Q: What sort of food did you eat?*

RATIGAN: Our cook had been a cook for a number of western teachers at the school. So he had a few dishes that he did very well, or did consistently anyway. One of them was spaghetti. We had spaghetti with meat sauce so often that when we came back to the States we never wanted to have spaghetti again. The other thing we had for lunch day after day was grilled cheese tomato and bacon sandwiches. I don't think I have ever had another one since. But he also made chocolate cake. You know, we had a stove with a gas oven; he made a pretty good chocolate cake. This was at a time when the boat steamers, the lake steamers were still going around Lake Victoria, much like the steamer you may have seen in the movie African Queen. There was a group of three boats that would go around to about six or seven ports on the lake, some in Kenya, some in Uganda, and some in Tanzania. It was the way people traveled from one place to another. The roads were very rough or non existent in some of these areas. So you get second class, where you would sleep out on the deck, or first class, where there were a few rooms. The boats would leave at about 10:00 at night and get into the next port the next morning at 7:00. So on these boats came the products of the British dairy in Kisumu in Kenya. So twice a week we would get butter, bacon and fresh milk. All of it would come in on a lake steamer. So we made it a point to try and be at the stores downtown when the lake steamers came around. We were really lucky to have access to these dairy and meat products each week.

*Q: This was as you said in the early period after independence of not only Tanzania, but Kenya and Uganda as well.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Right.

*Q: And the three countries had its prior heritage of East Africa common services so to speak. Did you travel to the other two countries? Was it sort of easy to get around?*

RATIGAN: It was. My wife Barbara's parents came over for a visit. My sister came over for a visit. My wife's parents lived in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and their travels up to that time according to my wife's reckoning were to New York, and maybe to Maine, New Hampshire, Boston. So when they came to east Africa, in the first place we met them in Uganda, in Kampala. They stayed at the Speke Hotel which was really the nicest hotel in Kampala. Kampala was a charming place in the mid-1960s. Very nice, bright, sunny, clean, it was a very nice city. So after a few days in Kampala, we set out on our tour. We had made reservations at a place we had gone to before, Queen Elizabeth park at Murchison Falls in western Uganda. The park was closed for many years due to the instability in Uganda, but I believe it has now reopened. In any case, we had been unable to get rooms inside the hotel, so they and we both had to stay in tents that had been set up near the hotel. So that evening, as we were sitting on the stone terrace of the hotel and having dinner, my wife explained to her parents that they were going to have to sleep in a tent in this pretty remote part of Africa. Tears began to form in my mother-in-law's eyes. A tent was definitely not what they had planned on. My wife didn't sleep a bit that night, worrying about them. I managed to sleep but my wife just lay awake the whole night.

*Q: Were you in a tent too?*

RATIGAN: We were. So the next morning, we couldn't wait to find out how things were. When we saw them, they were so happy and probably relieved as well. The hotel staff had brought them tea at 6:30 in the morning, had given them a shower which means go to this enclosed area and somebody dumps a bucket of maybe-hot water over you. But the crisis had passed and everything was wonderful, and they were good to go for the rest of the trip. So that was a relief. So we got to as I say Murchison Falls, which is a pretty



## Library of Congress

fabulous place, loaded with crocodiles and hippos. We drove from Uganda to Kenya, and visited some of the game parks there. We went to Tree tops, a game-watching hotel built into a tree which was quite a famous place at that time and then down into the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania. So it was a terrific trip. We basically did many of the same things when my sister came over. Then when we were alone we would go down to a beach at a place called Malindi which was up the Indian Ocean coast from Mombasa in Kenya. There were just a few mud-brick rondavels on the beach, and grilled fish to eat in those days. But it was a gorgeous place. Eventually, they built an airport and European tourists began flying in there by the plane load, and of course they improved the facilities. But in those days, we thought we were in heaven.

*Q: You said you had another Uganda story.*

RATIGAN: My wife used to have problems with her teeth. On at least one occasion and I think maybe two she had an abscessed tooth and she had to go to Kampala to find a dentist. She was in a lot of pain. I couldn't get away to go with her. The school wouldn't let both of us be gone at the same time. But she needed to go to Kampala. So she would take a series of taxis from point to point. She would get off at one point and take another taxi to another point. She went, armed with a bottle of Johnnie Walker Scotch for the pain. She was drinking Johnny Walker and taking these taxis all the way up to Kampala. She finally got there and located a dentist. The dentist she found was a man named Martin Alier, who had been educated at Northwestern, and was an excellent dentist as far as we could tell and a fine gentleman. I went to him for some of my own dental problems later on. He turned out to be so well regarded that in the post-Amin era he was either offered or mentioned for the presidency of Uganda.

*Q: He was Ugandan?*

RATIGAN: Yes. He turned down the presidency as I recall, but he obviously was a very well respected figure in Uganda. And Uganda, Kampala being the closest large city to

## Library of Congress

where we were, we, that is really where we tended to go on vacation. We found this one hotel in the center of town which seemed top be wonderfully located and with a nice porch and a pool table on the porch. We stayed there pretty consistently. It wasn't until about the third or fourth time we stayed there, we realized that it was a brothel. When they saw us coming I don't know what they thought. Anyway that is the place we consistently stayed.

*Q: Maybe you gave them some prestige and respectability and acceptance. OK, anything else you want to say about your Peace Corps experience? Any general reflection on whether the two years, I am sure it was worthwhile to you, but did you feel you made a contribution to the school and to Tanzania?*

RATIGAN: We really did. I think it was a terrific experience, a hell of a way to start your marriage, and just a terrific way to get introduced to another culture, another country obviously in the sense that you had a function to perform. Something to do that people needed. You know while we were there the other sort of main western presence in the area was religious missionaries. A group called the White Fathers ran the rich sort of big time school down the road, not a government school like ours. We were about five miles out of town, and a couple of miles closer into town was the school run by the White Fathers, called Ihungo. Whenever we went down there we just sort of marveled at all the things they had and had done to improve the place and so forth. One of the Fathers introduced me to the idea of how you preserve books. We ordered all of these books from England for the school, English-language books. For the English classes, we had a series of graded readers which used a graded vocabulary, English literature classics rewritten to use only the 1000 most common English words, or the most common 2000 or 3000. They were great for getting kids to read good literature at a difficulty level that they could deal with. Published by Longmans in England, and used all over Africa at least. These books got tremendous use by the boys. We had boys only at our school. So I learned from this Father how to paste cardboard into the front and cardboard inside the back cover of these paperback books, and then tape the spine of the book to preserve it so it didn't get beaten up and didn't become unusable in a short period of time. We started a bookbinding club

## Library of Congress

which I know continued after I left. We had all kinds of boys in that club. I mean they really responded and so when I left there that was a small but I thought a useful and practical thing. I was also the films master at the school. I was in charge of getting films to show at the assemblies of the whole school. We had the four high school classes and about 60 people in a class, so we probably had 230 to 250 boys in the school. So I would write letters to the British consul or USIA or USIS in Dar Es Salaam or Nairobi, and get films and some from commercial sources as well. We would get Tom and Jerry cartoons or documentaries, whatever we could find. One of the things we got was a movie that UISA put out on the assassination and funeral of John F. Kennedy. That went over very well, "Years of Lightning; Days of Drums" or something like that. One of the USIS films showed farming in the United States. At one point it showed this large wheat field and a series of four or five threshers or harvesters coming down this wheat field kind of one right next to the other. The boys saw that and understood immediately what it was about and were just floored. They couldn't believe that some mass harvesting like that could actually happen and were just fascinated. There was this very low roar that went through the boys as they watched these harvesters just moving down through that wheat field. It was the biggest reaction I got to any film ever.

*Q: Given African farming technique and the way they move around the scale was totally different but yet they could understand because they probably mostly came from either farming families.*

RATIGAN: Yes, they understood it for that reason. I think the harvesting was all done by what in Swahili are called "pangas," by what we would call machetes. I had one boy that I saw later in the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City from Tanzania from our school. Our Peace Corps time left quite an impression on my wife and me. It definitely was the reason later we decided to go into the foreign service.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Let me just ask you a couple of more questions about the school. It was a government school but the parents had to pay school fees which made it difficult for probably some families.*

RATIGAN: It did, quite a bit. We would read essays that they would write. I read a lot of essays obviously, as an English teacher. Certainly the subject of school fees and the ability of paying them was not a frequent theme but certainly a theme we saw from time to time. One of the books we read in these graded readers was Moby Dick, a simplified version obviously. So we were talking about it one day in class. So at the end of the book Ishmael gets back to land and I asked, "What do you think Ishmael did?" I don't know why I asked this stuff, but "What do you think he did when he got back?" One boy in the front row raised his hand and said, "He built the nation, Sir." That was what young students in Tanzania heard constantly at the time, that all young people and particularly students who had achieved a high school education — must help build the nation. One more story if I may. We had a Phillips battery operated record player that we had at the house. One day I took my record player down to my English class and I played a record for them, I said, "See if you can tell me what this, what music suggests is happening here. What you think might be happening. Something is going on." So I played them Beethoven's sixth symphony, you know, which tries to recreate the sound of a thunderstorm, and the sounds of birds calling, etc.. It was a bust. They didn't have any idea what I was after or what was going on.

*Q: They probably never heard western classical music before.*

RATIGAN: Or very rarely, but most probably never. It was silly of me, to have asked this of them with no preparation whatsoever. So I learned a few lessons that day.

*Q: How aware were the boys of what was happening in the wider world or even in the new nation of Tanzania in the capital, Dar Es Salaam?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I think considering where they were in the sense of being so far from the capital with so little access, they knew quite bit. There were Tanzanian newspapers and Ugandan newspapers that could be bought in the town, and once bought, they circulated widely. I think they were surprisingly alert to world affairs, public affairs. Some of them certainly were members of the political party, the Tanzanian African National Union even at that young age. We had a couple of guys who were very politically aware. One of them in my tenth grade class. I remember one young guy that I am referring to asked me one day who Liu Shaoqi was. He was still president or whatever he was in China. I didn't know the name, and I couldn't give him a very good answer. But this boy had seen his picture and name in the TANU newspaper, or maybe it was in a newspaper distributed by the Chinese Embassy in Dar Es Salaam. I wasn't able to answer that question very effectively, but you could see the kind of reading they were doing in the newspapers, the local papers. They would pick up all kinds of things. I mean the Tanzanian papers would include articles from Izvestia maybe, or from Pravda, the old Soviet newspaper. Or from what was the name of the Soviet news agency?

Q: TASS.

RATIGAN: And some Chinese stuff, who of course were beginning to be active there in Africa in the 60's.

Q: *In Bukoba were you aware of the Chinese?*

RATIGAN: No we weren't, but I think that there was, this was '65 and '66 that we were there, and I think there was discussion even then , I am sure there was, of building a railroad, and the Chinese would visit from time to time. Of course AID had a feasibility study and thought that the railroad would never pay for itself. It never did but, I am sure there was talk then of that. The Chinese were beginning to become more active. There was a great political story involving the U.S. when we were there as well. There were splits within the Tanzanian government — who was sort of pro western and who was pro

## Library of Congress

Chinese and pro Russian and so forth. A lot of mistrust, some mistrust of the States to the point where you may recall the story of the DCM in Dar Es Salaam. His name was Gordon I think, who was talking by phone to the U.S. consul in Zanzibar, who was Frank Carlucci. They were talking about a project that they were trying to get approved in Washington.. I think it was Carlucci who said, "You know I think we finally have got the ammunition to get this done," and of course the use of the word ammunition was all the Tanzanians needed. They were listening on the line, and so Carlucci and Gordon were both PNG'd. Just for that sort of innocent phone call where the wrong language happened to get used. At least that is my understanding of it, so that happened while we were there.

*Q: The teachers when you were there, when you and Barbara were there other than the other Peace Corps volunteers were mostly Tanzanian?*

RATIGAN: They were mostly Tanzanian because the Tanzanians were beginning to turn out teachers from teacher training colleges. I say beginning to, certainly the numbers were being ramped up. Then there was a Swedish teacher who I think taught biology. And there were some older African teachers there for awhile. I don't recall exactly what they taught but maybe four or five older African teachers, and then a couple of younger African teachers who had just come out of the teacher training colleges. Our headmaster was a Tanzanian who had just come back from a year or two at Oxford.

*Q: I think I recall Julius Nyerere was the first president of Tanzania as a leader before independence, teaching. I think he was from that part of the country, the western part. Does that ring a bell with you?*

RATIGAN: I don't recall where he was from. One of his great advantages was he was not from any of the — and one of Tanzania's great advantages — was they had no dominant tribe. I don't think Nyerere was from our area which was the northwest, but he did visit our school while we were there. We of course went through this tremendous preparation — , well, we all know what presidential visits are like. We went through the same thing at

## Library of Congress

the school. Sweeping the dirt roads with fronds from the eucalyptus trees and cutting the grass, and I think we probably painted some buildings. When he went through the line, I never really met anyone quite like Nyerere. The sense of peace that you had in looking at him. He would look at you right into the backs of your eyes. It was quite an experience meeting him, a very impressive guy. I think he adopted some policies that in retrospect certainly didn't work out too well, but as a leader you could just see what a presence he was.

*Q: When I served briefly in Tanzania later in 1992, he had retired and was living in the western part of the country in a village. I don't remember the name of it, but probably why I asked. You mentioned earlier that your experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania was a positive influence in your later joining the foreign service. During the period when you were a volunteer did you have much contact with the embassy in Dar Es Salaam or in Kampala, Uganda, or not?*

RATIGAN: We didn't have any with the embassy in Kampala but while we were in our first orientation tour in Dar, at the boy scout camp that I mentioned, I don't know whether we went to the embassy, I think we did. In any case, we met with some embassy people. I think the ambassador came around, I think it was David John Leonhart, came around and shook hands.

*Q: Bill Leonhart.*

RATIGAN: Yes. And he came around and shook hands and I think the DCM was there and some cultural people. They also brought in one of Tanzania's most provocative politicians, a guy by the name of Babu, who was from Zanzibar. He held one of the somewhat power positions in Zanzibar, one of the key figures in making the whole Tanganyika-Zanzibar merger work. He was quite the sort of you could almost say racy figure. He was known to smoke Cuban cigars which of course made it even more exotic, because he had been to Cuba, etc. He talked to us for I don't know maybe 45 minutes, including questions. We had

## Library of Congress

a lot of questions. He was fascinating; we just loved it. He stayed around and talked with us and said whenever you are in town let me know and we will have lunch or something like that. So that was a terrific experience for us. He gave us a sense of the political scene at the time and there certainly was an active political life in Tanzania and that he was definitely part of it.

*Q: Did you ever get to Zanzibar?*

RATIGAN: We never did, and we still regret that we didn't. I can't remember why, but we didn't. We have a Zanzibar chest however in the American Museum of Natural History downtown. We bought a Zanzibar chest while we were in Mombassa one time, you know, one of the classic old Arab chests with lots of brass studs and carried it around with us through the foreign service. Used it as a linen chest and so forth. We got home and couldn't figure out what in the world we were going to do with it. So we gave it to the Smithsonian. It is now on display at the Museum of Natural History with a plaque with our names on it and stuff, right next to a big, very impressive Arab door that really just steals the show down there.

*Q: OK, anything else to be said about the period of being a Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania, '65-'66? You said that after you left the Peace Corps basically did not continue in Tanzania. I made a note of that. That was essentially for political reasons?*

RATIGAN: Maybe a year or so after we left, the Peace Corps was "banned" in Tanzania. It was a foreign minister, a rather dashing foreign minister by the name of Oscar Kambona who I believe was successor to President Nyerere. Kambona was the one who really arranged for the banning of the Peace Corps and maybe even bringing in the Russians, I don't know. But it was definitely a political move.

*Q: OK, so you went home from the Peace Corps. You decided you needed to practice law. Where did you do that?*



## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I went out to Denver. I knew that I didn't really want to return to Minnesota. So we went out to Colorado. I was an enthusiastic skier. We had two sets of friends, one who lived in Denver, and one who lived in Boulder. So I went out and sort of pounded the pavement until I got a job with a firm out there.

*Q: You were an enthusiastic skier, let me back up to Africa just a bit because I know you didn't ski there, but did you climb Mount Kilimanjaro?*

RATIGAN: No.

*Q: Well that is a tragedy there.*

RATIGAN: Yes it certainly is.

*Q: So the law position you took was with a firm. You were there five or six years.*

RATIGAN: Yes. As I said, I was just not that taken with the law, I decided law was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Actually when we had our first child, I think that is what made me realize I didn't want to be in a job that I wasn't happy with. Somehow or other the idea of having a parent who was in a job they weren't happy with didn't seem like a good way to raise a child. So that is really what sort of started me looking and made me walk over to the post office \_\_\_\_\_

*Q: The child was born in Denver?*

RATIGAN: Yeour daughter.

*Q: When you went to the post office and saw the notice about the foreign service written examination, were you thinking primarily about your experience living overseas as a Peace Corps volunteer or were you thinking I would like to work for the federal government?...*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I was really interested in the possibility of living and working overseas. At some point after I applied to take the exam, I had lunch with a local lawyer who at one time had been fairly high official in AID. I had lunch with him one day and we talked about the pros and cons, but I think I just really liked the idea of living and working overseas kind of with other cultures.

*Q: So you took the written exam in Denver.*

RATIGAN: In Denver, actually I took it with a friend. There was a written sort of a multiple choice test in the morning, and then you came back in the afternoon to do an essay test. Well everyone heard all the legends about the foreign service exam and how difficult it was. I went back and had lunch at home and had a beer. I figured there was no way in the world I was going to pass this thing so I might as well just have a beer and take it easy. That afternoon I wrote the essay and I was amazed to find that several months later I had passed.

*Q: So you then did your oral interview. That was done where?*

RATIGAN: In Denver. I still remember some of the people who were on my panel. I remember the nicest thing they did, they just said, well they asked me what books I had been reading and so forth. But then they said, "Tell me about Africa," something like that. Just an absolute batting practice fast ball. So I started talking about Africa. I was getting a publication called Africa Report. I was still very interested in what was going on, so I think that probably helped me quite a bit.

*Q: Africa Report was published in America.*

RATIGAN: I think it was.

*Q: The editor at one point I think was Aaron Siegel.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I didn't know that, but the name I recall was Russell Warren Howe. So I got that every month. It was a good magazine.

*Q: OK, so you were accepted into the foreign service. You came to Washington to the Foreign Service Institute and entered the A-100 course. When did you do that?*

RATIGAN: We started January 2, 1973.

*Q: Well I think in these interviews the A-100 orientation class has been pretty well covered, but what did you do after that? Did you stay for an assignment in Washington?*

RATIGAN: Well one of the people who spoke to us in the A-100 class was a man named Alan Lukens who was just about to go out as DCM in Nairobi. I went up to him after his speech and said, "You know I have been assigned to Tehran but I speak Swahili and I would love to go to Africa." I wasn't trying to mess the system; I just wanted to let him know that I was interested. I think I had already been assigned. In any case, he I think, really did his best to see what could be done and ran up against whatever he ran up against, I don't know, but anyway it didn't work. But he certainly tried I think hard to get me a spot in Nairobi which would have been wonderful. So anyway having been assigned to Tehran I went and took Farsi language training.

*Q: For how long?*

RATIGAN: Well it was supposed to have been for six months but you know they pulled me out after four and said they really need you over there and so forth. So I went off and I think arrived in Tehran I think in July of '73.

*Q: And you were assigned to the consular section.*

RATIGAN: I was.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Which at that time was how large roughly?*

RATIGAN: It had one American services person, one immigrant person and two or three non immigrant visa officers. Then we had a couple of people who worked half days in the visa section. This was a time when we interviewed for non immigrant visas in the office, in the officer's office; now of course we interview behind bullet proof glass. Nobody gets close to you. But in those days in the early 70's you still interviewed in the office. It was often difficult to get people to leave the office if you turned them down. So we had two very attractive young Iranian women whose job among other things it was to get these guys out of the office. It wasn't the most efficient business, but it was a different era then.

*Q: And you were a non immigrant visa issuer?*

RATIGAN: I started on the immigrant side. The first, they started me on the immigrant visa side because they had two FSN's. One had 26 years of experience and one who had 20 years experience. There was no way I could screw this up. So the first case, literally the first case I had, I am interviewing this woman who was married to an Iranian guy but he was in the States. So there were problems. The marriage between the two was a proxy marriage. Somebody stood in for the guy in the States. I was pouring over the file and asking questions and one thing or another. At one point, you know this young woman is sitting opposite me and was carrying a pencil. It drops on the floor. She reaches down to pick it up and stands up again. Her blouse was wide open from the waist ushe was holding it open. I just, I mean honest to God the first case I ever got. All I can remember I felt my ears were about to burn off. I just whipped my head to one side. I realized oh I can look in the file. You know I just found some reason to turn her down and escorted her back out of the office. And then I thought, now did those two FSN women out there, did they know this was going to happen? Did they decide to test me out with this first case? I have not resolved that question yet, but I mean I wouldn't be surprised.

*Q: The first day, orientation.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: The first day, you know we are going to test this guy out and see where he comes down on this. Of course like two or three months later, the woman comes back for her re-interview having established whatever else she had to establish. She looked like she was going to choke on this blouse that was buttoned up so tight and went halfway up her neck.

*Q: Did she get her visa that time?*

RATIGAN: She did. So that was a very memorable introduction into the business.

*Q: Then later you moved to the NIV side.*

RATIGAN: I did. My office was right in front of a window. Anyway in the course of my time in NIV I had two death threats. I think the first one came in the first two or three months I was in NIV. The consular officers were allowed to go one by one with the consul general to attend staff meetings, the ambassador's staff meetings. So anyway I was there, and when the CG reported I had this death threat, and Richard Helms who was the ambassador at the time just looked at me and said, "Welcome to the club." So the response of the embassy's security team was to move my desk away from the window, but not to stop interviewing in the office or anything else.

*Q: Nothing affecting your movement or travel.*

RATIGAN: Well it was at a time when the two U.S. Air Force colonels had been killed in Tehran not too long before. So we all rode to work with Iranian guards in the white embassy van that took us from our homes to the office. We were such obvious targets in those vans it was ridiculous. But for some reason or other they didn't ride in the vans on Thursdays. So I would drive to the embassy on Thursdays in my own car. We worked from Sunday to Thursday and then had Friday and Saturday off. I always would go hither and yon, varying my route with a vengeance. But I always thought most people thought Thursdays were the most dangerous day because it was really Saturday in Iran, and

## Library of Congress

Friday was Sunday in terms of the religious observance. So there weren't nearly as many cops on the street or anything. I felt really safer driving to work on Thursdays by myself than going in one of the embassy vans.

*Q: The reason you were expected to drive yourself was the Iranian guards weren't available that day.*

RATIGAN: The vans still ran on Thursdays, but I decided I didn't want to take them on that day, because I thought the risk was so much greater on Thursdays. I think the guards must have worked an Iranian week where they were off on Thursday and Friday and it didn't coincide with our week. I am not quite sure, but I suspect that was the reason.

*Q: Who was the consul general?*

RATIGAN: A man named Cliff Gross who was a very good teacher and sort of lead into the business.

*Q: And the ambassador during the whole period you were there was Richard Helms.*

RATIGAN: It was.

*Q: And the DCM?*

RATIGAN: We had Jack Miklos and Charlie Naas. Charlie is a pretty well known Iranian hand. Miklos not so much.

*Q: This was the period not all that long before the revolution, 1979.*

RATIGAN: I served '73 to '75. You could actually, you could see when I first went there, it was the time of the oil shocks of '73-'74, so the price of oil had gone way up. Money was flooding into the country. You could see I felt that Iranians were becoming much more confident, much greater sense of their own importance, and of course Iranian kids

## Library of Congress

were going to the United States to school like crazy. We had this huge effort at issuing student visas. In that regard there was a particular incident that was quite dramatic. The consular section building was a block and a half or two blocks away from the main embassy building, but we set up a student visa unit basically in the embassy's motor pool area, on the main Embassy compound. So one of the visa officers over there was working under half days over in the student visa unit, and when the morning's work was done over in the student visa unit, an embassy car would take him and any other officers out of the embassy and over to the consular building. Well on one of those occasions when the car went from out of the motor pool and over to the consular building, a car pulled out in front of the Embassy car, and a car pulled in behind and an assassination attempt was made. The doors of the car were pulled open and the person in the car was shot several times. It was not the visa officer who was working in the mornings in the student visa unit, but an FSN who looked very much like him. So he was shot and killed. My wife and I attended his funeral. We loved him very much. He was almost blind. He was the best FSN we had in the consular section by far.

*Q: He had worked there many years?*

RATIGAN: Not that many. He was a young kid. He was 22 or 23. He was trying to get money to have his eyes operated on. He was going to go to Vienna. I and the officer that I mentioned who worked in the student visa unit, we decided we would sell our cars when we left and would donate the profit to help this guy get his eyes fixed in Vienna, because we had to give away the profit anyway under the rules. Well as they went through his things — this young FSN's things after his death — they came across floor plans of the consul general's house, floor plans of the visa section. It was clear that he was one of the conspirators and that he had set up this assassination attempt. The story was that when they pulled open the doors he was riding the back seat and he said, "No, not me," or "Not now" or something like that. So he was the one who was killed in his own assassination attempt. The other officer was immediately of course whisked out of the country. A lot of this only came clear months later. It was quite a traumatic event in many ways, certainly

## Library of Congress

for the officer who was the target of this assassination attempt, but for me too. We had been very close to this guy, and to realize that he had been plotting against us all this time came as quite a shock.

*Q: OK, anything else about your time in Iran. Your second child was born there.*

RATIGAN: Second child was born there.

*Q: Not in the American hospital.*

RATIGAN: They wouldn't let us use the Army's American hospital. People in the embassy, the State Department could not use the Army's hospital. So we used the Tehran General hospital. It was not a happy occasion. The details probably aren't that useful, but we weren't very happy with the way things were done.

My second year there I became the American citizen services officer. My job was really in two key functions. One was dealing with the American prisoners when they were caught if they came across with hashish or marijuana or God knows what when they came across the border from Afghanistan into Iran. DEA was active at that time. So I think what seemed to happen in these situations was that the Afghan border guards had it all set up so they would stuff something in the back of somebody's car as they were in Afghanistan and the Iranians would find it on the other side. The Americans who were caught were certainly not innocent in any case. But I think these setups were done to make the border guards look good to DEA. I made several trips up to Meshed, in northeast Iran, while these guys were in prison. When you flew up there, an interesting kind of a side bar here. You would often see several Americans on the plane going up to Meshed. They were dressed in blue jeans and had cowboy shirts and stuff like that. Number one, up there, there is no oil up there. They were manning the listening posts that were directed into the Soviet Union. Every once in awhile you would see them down — not that I recognized the faces — but they would be down in the embassy in the commissary, in the snack bar and stuff like that. Anyway so we went up to Meshed and visit these guys. There really wasn't much we could



## Library of Congress

do for them, but we always brought along magazines and newspapers. If they wanted to eat well, they could pay the guards and the guards would bring them decent food and so forth. One kid in particular we all thought was just the nicest fellow and must have been set up and so forth. So he got out and came down and visited us in the consular section. We all wished him well and off he went. Two months later we heard he had been picked up on a hashish charge in Lebanon and was in jail there. So obviously not nearly as innocent as we had thought. The other part of the job was with American spouses. Iranian students were going to the United States in wholesale numbers at that time. Many of them would meet American women and marry them and bring them back to Iran because employment prospects were very good for graduates of American colleges in Iran at that time. Money was flowing into Iran, and the Iranians were spending much of it on military projects. And there were a great many Iranians studying in the U.S. So there were a lot of these American wives of Iranians, and when they would arrive in Iran, the man, who was so charming in the United States as all the women said, would sort of revert to being more of an Iranian male and the wife would become the handmaiden or servant really of the mother-in-law. And of course the woman could not leave without the husband's permission, nor could any children. So the movie *Not Without My Daughter*, I knew Betty Mahmoody when she was there, the woman who wrote that book. And we would talk to and sympathize with these women constantly, miserable with their lives and yet unable legally to leave. I remember one woman who was trying to get out of Tehran. It was raining one day, and I went out and picked her up in an embassy car. She didn't want to talk in the embassy car because she was sure the driver would overhear, so we walked around in the rain. She was talking about going out on an Arab dhow, out to Kuwait or maybe Bahrain. I think ultimately she decided to go out in the back of a car over the mountains into Turkey. She made it, but she didn't have her baby and she didn't have any money. She just got herself out. There were a real lot of these cases. One of them we got out, we managed to help get out, and two or three months later she was back. She came in to the consular section. We said, "Why did you come back?" She said, "I can't help it; I still love him." It got to the point where there were so many problems like this that maybe it was

## Library of Congress

my legal background or whatever, but I put together an information sheet about what an American spouses rights were in Iran. I think it was two sides of a single page. This was back in the days when you mimeographed things. We did that. We sent them out to I think three or four hundred U.S. colleges where these Iranian students were studying. I am sure I showed this to my boss. I can't imagine what the front office would have thought, though: I was being very factual and all that kind of stuff. But I mean it highlighted the fact that American citizens got into problems. In retrospect that it got out and we sent it to all these schools. But who knows whether any young woman ever saw these sheets. You mail it out to these places and probably 80% of them go in the waste bin somewhere, but we would sent it out. I kind of vaguely remember hearing some grouching about doing something like that. But I certainly didn't know any better. I thought I was doing a public service.

*Q: did you travel around the country quite a bit? You mentioned going up to Meshed to visit American prisoners.*

RATIGAN: The best part of Iran was getting out of Tehran. We certainly developed a taste for caviar. You could get 100 grams of caviar for ten bucks in Tehran in the sort of grey market. As I mentioned earlier I am an enthusiastic skier. The skiing in Iran was excellent. I mean the Shah liked to ski, and they had two mountains where the snow, the snow on one mountain in particular was as good as anything you find in the western United States. But he had, and the snow was very good on the other mountain as well. He had first class Swiss and French equipment, lifts and all that sort of thing that he brought in, so the skiing was really good. So we did that a fair amount. We traveled around really quite a bit. Even though we had young kids it still worked. I remember sitting out with my wife at dinner one time in a place called Hamadan which is in western Iran. We were having a glass of wine and enjoying a nice dinner and so on. Somebody comes over to our table and says, "Excuse me, aren't you the U.S. consul? I have a visa problem." I didn't know how to wiggle out of that one, so we had to listen to this fellow. It certainly was a mood breaker. But they were always looking for a visa.

## Library of Congress

*Q: OK, is there anything else you want to say about your time in Tehran from '73 to '75?*

RATIGAN: Let me just say that I thought Richard Helms was a terrific ambassador. I think many officers tend to really greatly admire their first ambassadors, but I am a big fan of Richard Helms. I just thought he was a terrific human being. He treated the little people like me, I mean I couldn't have been any lower on the totem pole in that place. He treated me just excellently. He was one of the smartest human beings I have ever come across. You talk with him about some small thing and six months later he would ask you about it. Or you might go back to him and say, "I want to update you on this," and he was right there. He knew exactly what you were talking about. He was really good. So I was a big fan of his.

*Q: Did you have much to do with him directly in terms of organizing and going on a trip with him or anything like that?*

RATIGAN: He took me to a meeting of the cemetery committee. There was a foreigners cemetery in Tehran. The ambassador for some reason — met every once in awhile to do whatever had to be done. I am sure he had been prepped up by someone other than me. He would just sit there and tell you what was really going on in this meeting in the sub-texts, I guess you would call it — in a way that was just amazing to me. It was very impressive. Of course the intelligence officers at the embassy would tell you he would go into a room and work a room for 20 or 25 minutes and just come back and turn out page after page of cables back to Washington. They were in awe of what he could do. So his insight I guess into situations was very impressive.

*Q: Did you work with the political or economic sections much, USIS?*

RATIGAN: Oh yes because everybody wanted a visa. So we had some good people there. I mean I worked with people like Hawk Mills, Andy Kilgore, Henry Precht. The Prechts have become friends. Henry was the pol-mil officer there. Roger Brewin, I am trying to

## Library of Congress

think who the others were. I worked quite a bit with all of them simply over visa issues. One story that I heard at staff meetings was I think General Vandenberg was the Air Force Chief of Staff at the time. He paid a visit out to Iran because obviously we were selling them a lot of aircraft at that time and had huge operations of Boeing and Bell Helicopter and Lockheed and so forth were all represented with big operations there. So the Air Force Chief of Staff paid a visit to the Shah. The story in the staff meeting was they had their normal discussion and so forth, and finally the Shah said, "Tell me General, how do you get your pilots to keep on flying toward the target once they start shooting at them?" When the defense attach# told that story, the whole room just roared with laughter. So obviously to judge from the story anyway, it was a problem that they were having getting Iranian pilots not to turn away when the guns started shooting at them. Although, they sent them all to Lackland Air Force Base, we were issuing visas to Iranian pilots to go, so they were getting their training there primarily.

*Q: OK, anything else about Iran? Where did you go from there?*

RATIGAN: I came back and went to the op center. That was a fascinating experience. As a junior watch officer, you get an introduction to the functioning of the seventh floor, and you meet a lot of young middle grade people who are obviously going to go places in the department. I did that and it was a lot of fun. I can't remember any particular instances, though.

*Q: On the general subject of visits to Tehran were you a control officer for Congressional visits very much?*

RATIGAN: I was too young.

*Q: Too junior, and too important in terms that you had to be there to issue the visas.*

RATIGAN: Well maybe that too.

## Library of Congress

*Q: So you were a watch officer in the operations center. That meant that you worked shifts. You had that job for about a year?*

RATIGAN: Yeah. I loved working shifts. You got time to do things during the day when other people didn't. We were living in a place where I could roll out of bed and be at the office in non peak hours in five or ten minutes. We were very close. It was a good year.

*Q: Well I think like the A-100 orientation course I think a lot of people who we have interviewed have worked in the operations center, so maybe we will go on next to what was your next assignment?*

RATIGAN: My next assignment was on the Greek desk. Very demanding up there. I worked with you in EUR/SE with Nelson Ledsky as the office director. It was very exciting for me because I got to work in the political side of the department with some very good people. No flattery intended but it was I thought a quality operation we had. Jim Morton was my boss as you know, and we just developed a very good working and personal relationship. So that was just a lot of fun. One of the things I remember best about that was one day when the ambassador in Athens, Robert McCloskey, called up and wanted to be able to reply to a purported U.S. State Department cable that had been printed in one of the Athens papers. We were very suspicious of this cable because for various reasons it didn't seem to have the sound or quite the feel of a state department cable. So while Ambassador McCloskey was waiting on the phone talking with you and others I was madly trying to track down the date and verify the existence of this cable. So as with proving any negative, nothing you ever do is quite enough. Finally I had gone through so many files and looked as hard as I could, and just came to the conclusion that this cable was not one that had been sent from Washington and that it was a forgery. So Ambassador McCloskey was able to denounce it as a forgery, and I think really take the air out of whatever sails had built up over this insult to Greek sovereignty or whatever it was. That gave one a sense of some of the sort of I won't say outright anti Americanism, but certainly there was hostility to the United States. As you know it was shortly after the time of the colonels and

## Library of Congress

Cyprus intervention, so relations were not really so good between the U.S. and Greece at the time.

*Q: One of the things that I remember and why you came to be the junior Greek desk officer was the feeling that we have Nelson Ledsky in particular was that it was really a good idea to have people in the office of southern European affairs working on Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus who had seventh floor experience, who knew how the State Department worked, who had some insight into what the secretary, the deputy secretary, the executive secretary expected, how decisions were made. And even though you didn't speak Greek and had not served in Athens, it was a feeling on our part these other things. The ability to work in Washington was as important and in some ways even more important than knowing what was happening in Greece. I don't remember particularly all of these things in connection with you but this was our general approach and philosophy at that time. The reason we were continually involved with State Department principals on issues on Cyprus, on bases in Greece. There was still an embargo on Turkey which was lifted near the end of your time, or even after you left the office. But there were a lot of issues that involved the seventh floor, and that is partly why we wanted someone like you. You interviewed I think with Nelson or with me or both. That is why you came to be there. Probably not so much with me because I think you started about the same time I did, the summer of '76.*

RATIGAN: I don't remember who I interviewed with to tell the truth.

*Q: Anything you remember particularly other than this forged cable in Greece that you would want to mention during that period.*

RATIGAN: Nothing really. There were ongoing tensions with this November 17th group, so you know I think there was constant concern about physical safety and that sort of thing, One of the things I enjoyed the most really was having a chance to go out to Athens, to Crete and to Thessalonica during my stay on the desk and get a sense of what was really

## Library of Congress

going on. I know you had Nelson asked me to sort of give you an assessment of an officer in Thessalonica who was interested in becoming a desk officer. So all of that was nice. My former colleague in Tehran, Hawk Mills was I think DCM at that time.

*Q: Was McCloskey ambassador all during the period you were on the desk?*

RATIGAN: Jack Kubisch was there at the beginning.

*Q: Jim Morton, a senior Greek desk officer mostly handled relations with the defense department, bases issues?*

RATIGAN: He did. I think one of the things which was an eye opener to me was the extent to which Americans of Greek descent were so actively interested in American policy toward Greece. I mean that sounds kind of idiotic to be surprised by something like that, but I think before I went there I didn't really appreciate the extent to which there was interest and active sort of involvement of the Greek Americans in talking to people on the desk, taking Jim to lunch, talking with you and Nelson. Occasionally I would tag along to some of these things. It wasn't the social thing so much as they were simply generally interested in finding out what was going on. The other thing that was really surprising to me was how much they used the telephone and how quickly you could find out what was going on in Greece by simply picking up the phone, or they could rather, and calling friends and relatives back in Greece. So that was one of the things I recall.

*Q: The other thing that I would mention is that at that time, this period from '76 to '78, they were pretty united, the Greek American community. They were upset about Turkey and what had happened in Cyprus in 1974. Generally they welcomed the democratic restoration that happened in Greece, whereas in an earlier period some were supporters of the king, some supported the colonels. There was a lot of tension I think politically within the community, but at that particular time they were pretty unified I think even though they*

## Library of Congress

*were members of different organizations. But overall they had a fairly similar approach to Greece and American relations with Greece.*

RATIGAN: Certainly for someone in my kind of worms eye view of the thing it seemed that way to me as well. Of course for those involved in policy, there was also the presence in Congress of powerful Greek American Congressmen who were interested in what was going on and what we were doing and planning on and so forth. That presence in Congress I think doesn't hold quite so much power now as it did then. Key members were in very important positions.

*Q: Another thing that was probably new to you was working with the Greek embassy or with any foreign embassy in Washington because you really hadn't done that before. You want to say anything about that? Did that take much of your time?*

RATIGAN: Well they were very good. The people that we dealt with at the Greek embassy were diligent. They were active, they were frequently around the office. I am thinking of Lukas Tsilas who some years later became ambassador to the US, and who was then head of the political section, and a man named George Levidis who seemed to take me up, and some of the other young Greek political officers. They were good, cordial. You really felt like they were friends, although obviously they had jobs to do and so did we, but I mean it is a good working relationship with the people of the Greek embassy. Aware as we were that they had their interests of course. I think that Jim probably ended up and you and Nelson doing more socially with the Greek embassy on a number of occasions. That was fun. I enjoyed that.

*Q: Anything else you want to say about your time on the Greek desk?*

RATIGAN: No.

*Q: Where did you go from there, 1978?*



## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: For me personally I should say at the end of my time on the Greek desk it was a time of, a watershed time, a sort of fork in the road time. I had with this background on the desk, I had opportunities to move onward on the political side of things with perhaps an assignment in southeastern Europe. I had to decide whether to do that or go back to the consular part. I thought about that quite a bit and finally decided to go back to the consular function. I don't think I ever regretted that, but it was a tough decision. My wife and I spent a lot of time talking about what we ought to do.

*Q: Was that because you generally had a pretty positive experience in the consular section in Tehran?*

RATIGAN: I liked consular work. I really did, and you know Tehran was tough. We took a vacation after my year in the NIV section, and oh man I don't think I ever needed a vacation so much. But I really liked it too.

*Q: OK we are continuing this oral history with John Ratigan. Today is 24 August 2007. John when we finished our conversation the other day you had just come to the end of your assignment as the assistant desk officer for Greece in the European Bureau, and you were going off to the political economy course at FSI which was what a six month course?*

RATIGAN: Yes, it was six months. I took it to really have some kind of credentials as an multi-functional officer abroad and some capability. Of course I had just spent two years on the Greek desk and that certainly gave me some credentials in that area but I thought this would be a help. And as a matter of fact the assignment in Singapore did not begin until January of the next year, so the niche was there, and the fit was very good I thought.

*Q: You didn't need any language training for the Singapore position?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: That's right. But you know, I really enjoyed the course and we really had some excellent speakers including Bob Hormats, among others. But I don't really have any particular recollections of value for this oral history from that course.

*Q: It was essentially an introduction to both political and economic work and policy issues in the foreign service and the state department.*

RATIGAN: I'd say it was more the way policy and economics interact and the influence of, of course, economics on politics and that kind of thing, but certainly a grounding for people looking to work in both fields.

*Q: But your assignment to Singapore was neither political nor economic but multi functional.*

RATIGAN: It turned out to be a bit more multi functional that I thought thanks to an ambassador who chose to make use of me in some non consular ways, for which I was very grateful. Singapore was a small embassy, and since I was the head of a very small section and thus on the country team it gave me a real introduction to how embassies work, and just the way foreign affairs is conducted in a not insignificant place in the world. I guess we should start with the first ambassador who was a political appointee and a politician. I suppose about maybe about four to six months after I got there, he fired his DCM. In personnel terms I am not quite sure how that works. I think it was that he requested his recall or reassignment. During the time I was there the DCM of course was a foreign service officer, and it was an interesting kind of study of the relationships between political appointees and foreign service officers and the foreign service bureaucracy. During my career I served with four political appointees, not including in Canada where they were in the embassy and I was consul in Toronto so it wasn't really a relationship that I had a chance to observe, but in other posts a total of four political appointees. I must say in three cases the relationship was as good as you would want in any circumstance, an excellent relationship that didn't seem to have any problems. But in this one, the

## Library of Congress

relationship was good on the surface it seemed to me, but there were, you get a sense underneath that there were problems and that one of the problems was that I think the ambassador didn't read very much. I think he preferred to learn things by talking to people and in fact was an excellent communicator. You know, he would talk with people, he would learn things that way. But he also needed to read in order to effectively represent himself and the United States.

*Q: Was he a good listener?*

RATIGAN: Not particularly, I mean average. I am not sure he was really all that interested in diplomacy or not really very aware of the issues either of diplomacy or what they were in the Far East. So that I think that this became a bit difficult at times for the DCM to try and either educate him or fix up little situations that occurred along the way.

*Q: If we could back up just for a second. You went to Singapore in January of 1979. So that was toward the end of the Carter administration.*

RATIGAN: Right.

*Q: So who was this ambassador and how long had he been there when you got there?*

RATIGAN: The ambassador was Richard Kneip. He was a former governor of South Dakota, I think three time governor of South Dakota, elected by huge margins. I think known to Carter through days in the Governors conference and so forth. He, as I say, was an excellent communicator, but I think when the assignment was made I think that those who made the assignment realized that U.S. relations with Singapore were rock solid and that whatever, however he chose to conduct something it wasn't going to have much of an effect on the underlying relations.

*Q: When did...*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Oh he came out probably in the summer before we did, which would be June of '78. He arrived, you know the Chinese as you probably know are great numerologists, and he arrived his family consisted of eight sons. Eight of course, is the ultimate lucky number in Chinese. Sons of course are the ultimate lucky offspring. So he arrived with his eight sons and his wife and got off that airplane, I mean all of the newspapers — so I was told, I wasn't there at the time — they had a picture of the family and the eight sons. Everyone sort of figured that the numerology of this appointment just couldn't possibly have been better. He was off to a good start.

I remember one particular staff meeting that we had where at the end of the meeting the ambassador sort of started a discussion about whether Asians were less caring about the value of human life than other ethnic groups or races. The DCM had more experience in Asia. The DCM at the time was Ed Ingraham, a very experienced hand in the East Asia area, and as the most experienced officer in the room I think the DCM began the response and said, "Not at all." Asians were, I recall the tenor of the argument but he certainly defended the human values of Asians. That was the kind of thing I think that gave me the feeling of certainly Ed was challenged in some of the situations to keep his calm. I think there were some situations where he simply wasn't able to conceal his lack of respect for the ambassador, although that particular situation, which I witnessed, was not one of them.

*Q: Ingraham had been chosen by the ambassador?*

RATIGAN: I don't know.

*Q: They had both been there some time before you .*

RATIGAN: Yes. Ed had been there for I think a longer time than the ambassador so I think the ambassador probably inherited him.

*Q: You said the ambassador in roughly the summer of '79 asked for his assignment or recall. Would you say from your observation and perspective the differences were*

## Library of Congress

*background, personality, or in terms of how to run the embassy, management style, or were they about relations with Singapore and how to conduct them, or was it sort of a combination of things?*

RATIGAN: I don't think it was so much about how to run the embassy. I think it was probably as much as anything Ed Ingraham having to tell the ambassador or feeling that he had to tell the ambassador what he should do and what he shouldn't do. I think the ambassador probably felt, and I don't have any evidence, but I think the ambassador probably felt that he could do pretty much whatever he wanted to do, not so much in terms of policy but in terms of his kind of his personal conduct and or what he said or how to handle situations or something like that. Ed may have not been able to hold himself back in some situations he felt needed to be handled in a certain way. The ambassador was a man who felt that he was pretty free, that he had rights to do certain things he wanted to do. There are a couple of stories. One thing he did while he was there was to have a local carpet-maker in Singapore make a carpet in the center of which was woven the I don't know whether it was the seal of the United States or the seal of embassy of the United States — big, you know probably seven or eight feet across. He put that in the front hall of the residence, and of course packed it up when he went home, though I am sure the Embassy paid for it. Then also one night I accompanied him for some reason I don't really know, but I accompanied him when he was asked to preside at the grand re-opening of Robinson's Department Store which is one of the biggest department stores in Singapore. They had been shut down for huge renovations. So the ambassador was doing the ribbon cutting that night. So I went with him and we did the ribbon cutting, did the speeches, everyone was happy. Then the general manager took the ambassador on a tour of the store. At one point toward the end of the tour we stopped in front of a display of Chinese cuckoo clocks. Don't ask me what a Chinese cuckoo clock is, but you can get the general idea. The ambassador said, "Gee, I have a mantle piece over which that cuckoo clock, this particular one would just fit perfectly." Well of course the cuckoo clock was delivered to the residence the next day. When the ambassador later packed up the ambassadorial china

## Library of Congress

and shipped it back to South Dakota the department administrative staff got into the act and advised him that they wanted the china back, or that he had the option to purchase it for a given price, which I understood at the time was the standard arrangement for ambassadors. So anyway that went on for a number of months, the department trying to get the china back or the price paid. In accordance with that I was asked to come in. I did an affidavit about that incident at the department store. Ultimately the issue was resolved. I think the ambassador must have paid something or other for the china. There were of course other incidents especially as his time in Singapore drew to a close. I don't want to go into those but it got to be, he seemed to reveal his dissatisfaction with the foreign service and his time with us I think in a number of ways.

*Q: Your own personal relations with him were up and down?*

RATIGAN: They were good actually up until the end, when as I say a number of things happened, but one of them was he was going back, I wonder when it would have been. Oh it was for the 1980 presidential campaign. So this was probably in May of 1980, something like that. He was leaving and he wanted a visa for his driver to come over and visit him in South Dakota. Being the consular officer I said, "Fine, we will issue a visa to your driver, but he is to understand that he is not there to work for you. He is not there to drive for you."

*Q: A non immigrant visa.*

RATIGAN: Yes, just a standard tourist visa. There wasn't the slightest doubt in my mind what he intended. He was going to tour the state of South Dakota on behalf of Jimmy Carter who was running for re-election and do his part to help President Carter of course. But the Ambassador didn't like my trying to advise him on what his driver could legally do. Anyway that was just one thing that turned into an irritant with him, but there were a number of others.

## Library of Congress

*Q: After Ed Ingraham left as DCM, the ambassador stayed another nine months or almost a year. Did a new DCM come?*

RATIGAN: We had a temporary DCM come out from EAP for a while, Dan Sullivan, who calmed things down and got things back to normal. But then we got a new permanent DCM. He was the director of East Asia at USIA, a man named Mort Smith. I thought he was terrific. He was excellent.

*Q: He was chosen by Ambassador Kneip? They still have a good relationship.*

RATIGAN: I am not sure how much input the Ambassador had, but I am sure some. Mort managed it well, though. I mean I am sure Ambassador Kneip met Mort or at least talked with him on the phone obviously, but I suspect at this point the department also wanted to make sure they had someone solid that they could trust out there as well. I think Mort Smith was an excellent one.

*Q: You mentioned that I guess Ambassador Kneip allowed you to do things beyond the consular section other than going to Robinson's department Store. What sort of things did you do?*

RATIGAN: Actually it was more his successor, Harry Thayer. When Ambassador Kneip left, Harry Thayer came on as the new ambassador.

*Q: A career officer.*

RATIGAN: A career officer yes, and an East Asia, China hand, spoke Chinese. But you know we had some long term internal issues, as so many embassies do, and in this case it was dissatisfaction between the FSN's and the American staff. The FSN's sort of presented some grievances or whatever. Anyway Ambassador Thayer asked me to chair a committee to deal with these kinds of problems. That was interesting. I will say right now I learned a lot from seeing things from both sides, and seeing kind of how maybe both

## Library of Congress

sides didn't understand the needs of the other. Interestingly, I saw exactly the same sort of issue when I worked at two different law firms, the same sort of differences between the staff and the professionals. Very large, very hierarchical organizations, probably in this case even more hierarchical than the State Department in their operation focus. It was exactly the same in the law firms. You could see them not dealing with them as well as the state department tries to deal with similar issues. It was really quite interesting to see how they just kind of slough off these issues. So I did that:. I chaired this committee on relations between the FSN's and the American staff. We came out with everything else some recommendations. The ambassador really implemented, accepted most of these. Then I was asked to handle one of the most significant CODELs (Congressional Delegations) that we had in the time that I was there. I think the ambassador felt that way anyway. It was Doc Long, Representative Clarence Long, who was the chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that dealt with the State Department.

*Q: And probably all foreign operations, AID and issues like that.*

RATIGAN: I think a notably irascible or potentially irascible fellow. He came out to Singapore.

*Q: With a big delegation?*

RATIGAN: Not so big, no. He had two or three guys. They would come into the residence and they would start making notes. You felt like the lights are burning too bright or whatever little middling things they were making notes about. But I think my sense was the visit went off well. We seemed to get along well. He was quite an interesting guy and never short on opinions. Actually as I think about it now, there were a couple of other Members on the visit. There was Representative Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma and maybe one or two other Members....

*Q: Were you the control officer for several other delegations as well?*



## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: A couple of others, yeah. One of them was Louis Stokes from Cleveland and I think one I don't really remember. So anyway in Singapore whenever you had a delegation Congressional or otherwise one of the interesting things to do was to tell them as you rode in from the airport, "All right, now I suggest you look at the street or the road and whenever you see a piece of waste paper on the road sing out." Well they never saw any. It is so clean. So that kind of got the visit off to an interesting start. That gave them kind of an idea what we were dealing with and got people engaged right from the beginning. I will say two or three years ago for our 40th wedding anniversary, my wife and I and my sister and her husband went to Thailand and then down the peninsula to Singapore. When we were in Singapore my brother-in-law was particularly, he had read all the stuff about Singapore and couldn't believe what he had read. One day he kind of broke off from our group and decided to go around and visit the slums in Singapore and find out what was really going on. He was very frustrated. He couldn't find any slums in Singapore. It is true. It was an amazing place.

*Q: Americans and other foreigners have gotten themselves in trouble in Singapore over the years for not respecting or observing some of those mores or morals or regulations. Was that something that you had to deal with as a consular section on occasion?*

RATIGAN: Sometimes. Singapore is a tough place. They don't fool around. By that I mean there is a death penalty for I think any amount of what they would call hard drugs and I think more than 15 grams of marijuana which is like half an ounce. So as a result the school, the Singapore American school would regularly conduct searches, go into kid's lockers to find, search the lockers to see if there were any sort of drugs like that. Anyone who was found or known to have any sort of drugs, they were on the plane that night. There was, nobody waited. Once anything was found the rule was you were on the plane that night. No ifs ands or buts about it. One of the most interesting problems of Americans in Singapore was a woman who was arrested on the steps of the parliament building yelling and shouting and waving her arms and so on. She was picked up and taken out

## Library of Congress

to Changi Prison which is a fairly famous prison. Now there is a new Changi Prison, but the old one was the site of the novel *King Rat* by James Clavell about life in wartime Singapore. But anyway, so I went out to visit this woman. She told me that she was Agent 001 and that she was licensed to kill, and that she was on her way to Spain to pick up some gold bullion at the treasury or something but the CIA was after her and was going to kill her, and also U.S. Treasury agents were after her to kill her. So I, of course, set about to set up her repatriation to the United States. I went out there, and she was a very large woman, probably six feet tall and over 250 pounds. When she came into the interview room she was escorted by about half a dozen Singaporean female prison matrons. They really looked like nothing more than tugboats escorting the QE-II. So in any case she didn't want to leave. She was convinced that these agents were out there and they were wanting to kill her. So ultimately I met with a Singaporean police lieutenant. I told him that we could not send her back to the United States until she had given us permission to do so. He looked at me like I was the biggest fool in the world. Here I was this representative of this great world power and I was telling him that I could not send back one of our own citizens who was obviously mentally deranged back to her own country of residence without her permission. He could not understand this at all. In any case I won her confidence by bringing cigarettes out to her. We'd sit there puffing away and she would tell me one thing and another. I finally convinced her that she had to stick with me, and that I was the only one that could help her, and that she had to get home. Meanwhile I had arranged this with the department. So we finally managed to get her on the plane. We had to get an escort to travel with her, and she had to be sedated before she went because the airline wouldn't take her without sedation. But in any case it all worked out and she ultimately got back. But anyway I tell the story mainly for the reaction of the local policeman to our American rules about obtaining the individual's permission.

One other story I suppose, one night I got a call from the marine guard at the embassy telling me there was an American citizen who wanted to sleep in the embassy that night. So I went down and met this fellow who was a professional golfer. He had been staked

## Library of Congress

by some investors back in Nevada to come and play on the Asian tour, develop his game by playing on the Asian tour. He wasn't doing very well. It seemed to me a classic case of culture shock. We sat on the front step of the Embassy and he told me that people were following him around. He would tell me his investors had hired people to maim him or wound him or somehow or other get back at him for basically wasting their money. So he requested to sleep in the embassy to get away from these people who were following him. There was of course no way that the embassy security officer or the Marine was going to allow him to sleep in the Embassy. So I took him around to some very western places, a modern hotel that we had stayed at before with good western food. He was ticketed to go out on the plane the next morning, so I basically kept him up until close to midnight and got him back to his hotel and off he went the next morning. I have never seen quite so much culture shock in an individual as in that case.

*Q: You mentioned the consular section was pretty small. Did you have another American officer or just basically you and...*

RATIGAN: I had a rotational officer, so I had three or four different officers. The one really substantive problem that we had at that time was Indo Chinese refugees, which of course was in '79-'80, when they really began to leave Vietnam in large numbers. So we had camps in Singapore. What would happen to our refugees, the ones that we got were primarily ones whose boats failed. They would get off, most of them would head to Malaysia I think or Thailand of course. But sometimes the boats would fail, the engines would fail, and they would kind of start drifting at sea. When they would get into the sea lanes they would be picked up by commercial vessels and even U.S. military vessels on occasion who were ordered to pick them up when they saw them. So we ended up with these refugees who had been picked up by seagoing vessels that came into Singapore. So we had our hands full really in getting out to camp and interviewing them. The officer who really handled this for me at the time was an extremely capable young woman who later became quite well known in the department. Her name was Ann Hackett. She was a leading admin officer. Ann was a terrific refugee officer. When our operation was, our

## Library of Congress

little consular operation was replaced by a formal refugee office in Singapore, Ann was replaced by seven people, and I think legitimately so. So that was the big problem for us.

*Q: Ann Hackett worked for me at one point, before your time. She was a very fine officer. I didn't realize she had refugee credentials from Singapore. The camp was run by UN officials?*

RATIGAN: It was run by UNHCR outside of Singapore. It was a pretty good camp actually. I forget what it had been used for before the refugees arrived, but there were some people in it.

*Q: Singapore is a small country, city-state I guess you would call it. Did you get very involved with regional things related to Malaysia or Indonesia? You mentioned Vietnam refugees.*

RATIGAN: We certainly were involved in that with the Vietnamese refugees quite a bit. We had an ongoing struggle with the embassy in Malaysia for jurisdiction over Brunei.

*Q: Which was not independent at the time or we didn't have an embassy there?*

RATIGAN: We didn't have an embassy there. So we had officers stationed there from time to time. I had known several who were there, but they reported to the embassy in Malaysia but they were basically serviced and spent their sort of R&R time in Singapore. So we thought, what is this, we are the appropriate embassy to have jurisdiction. It was a friendly rivalry, but it seemed like whenever you dealt with somebody from Brunei you would get a call from the DCM in Malaysia saying what is going on. But as I say, we got along with the U.S. embassy in Malaysia. But Singapore was a regional center in many ways, and there were a lot of region-wide operations going on there, whether governmental, or business or whatever. Singapore was a prominent member of ASEAN. We had I think we had the ASEAN post ministerial conference in Singapore one year, I am sure we did. But

## Library of Congress

every year it was a big issue for which the ambassador would go to this post ministerial conference. I am never quite sure why they called it that.

*Q: What was that, a conference of the American ambassadors after the ministerial?*

RATIGAN: I think that must have been what it was. There were ministerial conferences among the ASEAN members and then usually the secretary of state or his or her designee would come out and speak. Then there would be kind of an informal chiefs of mission conference simultaneous or immediately following that. One year it was in Singapore I am sure, and then one year it was in Bali. On the last day of the conference, the participants traditionally put on these skits and stage presentations. I can recall, but there are usually good stories about someone dressing up, I mean Colin Powell dressed up as some sort of cowboy, I believe, in a skit with the Japanese foreign minister, a woman, who was dressed up as a bargirl, or something like thaa proper bargirl, I am sure. But it got a fair amount of play in the press.

*Q: But this was long after your time there.*

RATIGAN: But it is a well established institution is what I am trying to say which is not overly formal.

*Q: There is another organization that I think started well after the time you were in Singapore, the Asia Pacific...*

RATIGAN: Economic conference. APEC, yeah.

*Q: But that hadn't started while you were there.*

RATIGAN: I think there were glimmerings. I just can't remember it. I can't remember because I also got involved with it when I was in Korea. I think that is when it really came together more. But that of course covered, I think it met a need that was such that it was

## Library of Congress

bringing in people from all around the Pacific Basin. I think Chile is a member of APEC and some other South American countries bordering the Pacific as well.

*Q: I think maybe the European Union gets involved somewhere.*

RATIGAN: Yes, it is broader.

*Q: Did Mort Smith continue to be DCM pretty much the rest of your time working with Ambassador Harry Thayer?*

RATIGAN: He did. He worked for Ambassador Thayer. Mort was there I think until I left.

*Q: Was there a combined political and economic section?*

RATIGAN: There was. A combined political and economic section.

*Q: Harry Thayer was in the senior seminar '79-'80. So he must have gone out as ambassador maybe at the beginning of the Reagan administration in '81.*

RATIGAN: I think that is exactly right. I think he said he had come out of the senior seminar.

*Q: I don't know how long he stayed there, but he actually replaced me as dean of the school of language studies at FSI in '87 I think. He may have done something else in between. Maybe going to Taiwan.*

RATIGAN: He was in Taiwan, yeah.

*Q: After Singapore or before?*

RATIGAN: Oh I don't know. I thought I knew.

*Q: OK, anything else we can say about your assignment to Singapore?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I don't think so.

*Q: Where did you go from there; this was the summer of 1982.*

RATIGAN: Actually I came back to the department in January of 1982 when my three years was up. I had been assigned as consul general in Cairo. A former colleague from Tehran, Henry Precht was the DCM in Cairo. In addition to having a fascination with Egypt, my wife and I were offered the chance to work with Henry. So off we went to Egypt. I had language training.

*Q: For how long?*

RATIGAN: About four months.

*Q: That is a pretty quick time to learn Arabic.*

RATIGAN: I came to it with some advantages because I had learned Farsi. My Farsi was fairly decent by the time I got through in Tehran. Of course I think there was about a 25% overlap in both vocabularies between Farsi and Arabic. And as former dean of the language school I will tell you that I thought that my grade in Arabic was a bit inflated by the staff. I can see them doing it to get me out of there in four months instead of six.

*Q: What score did you get?*

RATIGAN: I don't know a 2+-2 or something like that.

*Q: That is pretty good for four months.*

RATIGAN: Well I am not sure I deserved it. Egypt was a contrast to Singapore in so many ways. I mean we arrived at the airport and we sort of drove all the way around Cairo from the airport to our embassy housing in a suburb called Maadi in the south where we stayed until our house was ready. So by the time we got there it was dust and smoke

## Library of Congress

from burning tires filling the air. My wife had started to cry. It was not a happy arrival even though we were welcomed by the Prechts and taken very good care of etc. But it was totally different. Whereas in Singapore I had this wonderfully efficient small compact highly effective staff, in Cairo we just had kind of a rambling facility. We had twice the staff at least and everything seemed a struggle to operate. But anyway we came to love Egypt and I think probably did more there and found more to do there than in any place we ever were, but it was a different place.

*Q: Was it a big section? You had other American officers?*

RATIGAN: We had how many? We had about five or six American officers I guess. The problem was that, or one of the problems was that since it wasn't an embassy of consular significance but it was an embassy of political significance, and so if you had a problem it was very difficult to get in touch with your Egyptian opposite number because the foreign ministry didn't pay their people much of anything so as a result they didn't really show up at all. So getting them on the phone was extremely difficult.

*Q: The phones probably didn't work very well.*

RATIGAN: The phones didn't work. Siemens and AT&T were both working on the phones as part of foreign aid programs, which I think helped a lot eventually but not much then. To get across town by car was impossible. To get to the foreign ministry because the phones didn't work, everybody else was trying to drive somewhere because the phone was not operable, so the traffic jams were constant all day long.

In Cairo, our AID mission was headed by a guy named Mike Stone who was a former California vintner who owned Sterling Vineyards, but he had just sold it to Coca Cola I believe. Mike was a very good AID director and went on to be the secretary of the air force later on. He was the man who had to explain the \$600.00 toilet seats and all those outrages, and I thought did an excellent job of doing it. Anyway, we had navy tropical medicine people there. We had the Library of Congress. We had all the other usual



## Library of Congress

suspects plus the Library of Congress, the legal attaches, etc. It was a huge embassy. I think much of the direction of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan was run through the embassy in Cairo. We would have these unannounced visits of Bill Casey to the building. You would never do anything other than just see him getting out of the car and going into the chancery, but there was a lot going on in that area from Cairo.

*Q: Was the consular section co-located with the chancery, or were you somewhere else?*

RATIGAN: We were not in the main chancery building. There was sort of a compound, a walled compound, and we were in another building. So it was maybe less than 100 yards from the chancery to our building. I didn't have, I didn't see the political and econ people and the DCM and so forth on a regular basis. We did have one interesting problem there, and that is we had an American woman who was hanging around Cairo and basically looking for something to do in the field of foreign affairs. Her hero was a woman named Oriana Fallaci who was well known as a journalist and a fairly provocative journalist and so forth. So this young American woman wanted to go to Libya to interview Muammar Qadhafi. So you know she came to me at some point or other and I told her you can't go to Libya without permission of the U.S. government etc. Anyway she hung around, she was not only a student at the American University in Cairo but got into other bits and pieces and didn't really have any way to sort of maintain herself. I was concerned that she was going to do something that would land her on the front pages of the local press, or even the international press. So finally we simply decided that this was not someone that was in the interest of the U.S. government to have remain in Egypt. So as consul general I was regularly visited by sort of embassy's liaison with internal security forces in Egypt. Of course he was there to get visas for his friends or higher-ups. You know we would have a cup of coffee and we had a regular relationship. At one point or another I simply identified who this person was and said, "Next time she came up for renewal we didn't want her around anymore." Sure enough she was gone. It was a bit of a new thing for me. I think that it was a decision I mean she could have embroiled us in a mess if she had taken

## Library of Congress

some of these initiatives she wanted to take. She ultimately came back to Cairo. I don't know quite how, but anyway I think she was little less ambitious the second time.

*Q: You mentioned that Henry Precht who you served with in Tehran was the DCM. Of course this was not long after he was country director for Iran at the time of the embassy takeover and all of the related events. Who was the ambassador?*

RATIGAN: The first ambassador was Roy Atherton. Then second he was succeeded by Nick Veliotis. Two I thought, excellent ambassadors, quite different in their styles. Roy Atherton I just always felt just never put a foot wrong. When he left Egypt, the parties, the praise, the genuine feeling for him was really amazing. I mean given that we have an always controversial role in the middle east and there are always people who are not happy with what we are doing one way or another, They all seemed to kind of put that to one side where Roy Atherton was concerned. He just had a very deft sense of how to operate. And Nick, of course, Nick Veliotis was different in many ways. Nick was an opinionated guy. He could have fun with it and you would enjoy being in his presence. He was fun to be around. I think famously when he was overheard on the phone criticizing those who conducted the Achille Lauro hijacking at sea, and killing of the crippled American guy. I mean he said what I think so many of us would have said in the same situation, but it just didn't work out for him.

*Q: Were you there at that time?*

RATIGAN: No, the Achille Lauro happened shortly after I left. I got there right after, shortly after Sadat had been assassinated. I think the Achille Lauro was in '85 or something, and we left in '84.

*Q: Anything else you want to say about your time in Cairo as consul general?*

RATIGAN: We loved it; it was a wonderful place, but professionally it was hell to work there, but I have already talked about that.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Did you get involved in things related to Israeli or Israelis?*

RATIGAN: We had a few issues at the border crossing point at Rafah, but nothing serious.

*Q: Other regional things, you mentioned Libya.*

RATIGAN: Not really.

*Q: Did your Arabic work in Cairo or not really?*

RATIGAN: It was frustrating. I went out there and I have always been very interested in visa issues but somehow or other I seem to, the natural slot for me seemed to be dealing with American citizens. So as soon as I arrived in Cairo I seemed to be dealing with more American citizens than with visa issues. So my Arabic degraded rapidly/ It was never as good as it was in Washington. I like languages and I was disappointed in that.

*Q: You mentioned American citizen service, were these mostly American tourists, resident Americans all of the above. They did some terrorist attacks on American tourists over the years.*

RATIGAN: There have been terrorist attacks on foreigners in general over the years, but that wasn't a major problem when I was there. For American tourists, it was mainly health and safety issues. What would happen is that they would come over of course on these package tours and they would go up to Luxor and some extent Aswan, but usually in Luxor in the Valley of the Kings. The tour companies would roll you out at 5:30 in the morning and make sure that you were up early in the morning so that you could go into the tombs and do the tourism before the sun really got hot. Well the stress of these situations took its toll on elderly Americans, and we had quite a number of American deaths, what seemed to us to be an unusually high number of American deaths among people who were there at the time. You know we had a routine for that and we handled it and so forth. But I think that was one of the really principal causes, and then as tourism failed and these large

## Library of Congress

tour boats that you often see ply up and down the Nile became less and less financially viable, there started occurring fires on these tourism boats. As one might think the owners decided to burn them and collect the insurance rather than continue to operate them. Well we had a couple of those. In one particular case the boat was almost entirely Americans. We came to work one day and we had 50 or 60 Americans basically in their pajamas waiting in the visa waiting room, trying to get some money, trying to get anything to get themselves squared away. So we had to, we did whatever we could for them. We had a cash fund we used for emergencies, but obviously it was just a pittance compared to what they needed. That kind of thing started to happen with a fair amount of regularity toward the end of my time there. I think it continued on later as tourism to Egypt just fell off. Of course then the shootings and the threats to tourists came a bit later.

*Q: As head of consular section with a very large American resident population connected with American University Cairo, the AID program, the military, all these things, did the Ambassador or DCM expect you to for example get involved with the school or other American community things or not really.*

RATIGAN: We had two kids in the school so as parents we got involved, but the admin counselor was on the board at the school, and so that was the principal liaison. I wasn't really asked to do anything special with either the business community or the school.

*Q: OK, anything else you want to say about your time in Cairo which I think ended in 1984?*

RATIGAN: It did.

*Q: So you were there about two years.*

RATIGAN: Two years, and I think Henry Precht was hoping that I might extend. I had designed a new design for the sort of dysfunctional design of the consular section, and of course we were in the process of building a new building at the time. When I first came

## Library of Congress

there I had harbored thoughts of actually handling the move in to the new building. But Egypt being Egypt, things didn't quite move that fast. There were other issues as well, but after two years I felt like it was so difficult to operate there. You could not operate to Washington standards. So I just decided not to extend, even though the family loved it and I certainly enjoyed it, we decided not to extend. So we moved on. During my time there while I was applying for my next job in the foreign service I told personnel I wanted to work on immigration legislation which was currently a hot topic in Congress. Simpson-Mazzoli was the name of the bill. So I told them I wanted to work for either Simpson or Mazzoli, I didn't care who, on the immigration legislation. I think Diego Asencio was the assistant secretary for consular affairs at that time. I don't know but I was told he was delighted by this and so it was subsequently arranged that I would work for Senator Simpson. So that leads really directly into my next assignment. I came back...

*Q: Let me ask you one last question about Cairo. You mentioned something about doing a new design about the dysfunctional consular section. Did you do that, and what was the dysfunction, the people, physical layout?*

RATIGAN: the physical layout. You know there were just pillars everywhere. I have no idea how old the building was, but it certainly wasn't new. So we had these huge pillars just all over the place which made any kind of flow very difficult. So even designing a new layout given the space that we had was an improvement, but not as good as it could have been, and certainly not as good as I'm sure it became when they had the new building.

*Q: And the consular section in total moved into the new building.*

RATIGAN: Yes. We were on the ground floor I think. As it turned out ultimately there were two buildings. I am not sure that is the way the plan started but, I don't think I have been back there since the new buildings, but I think they turned into two buildings ultimately. So yes and I mean that was probably in the late 80's.

## Library of Congress

*Q: I was there in '95 or '96 something like that, and I have, I didn't really know Cairo before, and I know I went to the new building and met with the ambassador. I don't remember that there was a second building. They may well have been. I just remember one building when I was there.*

OK, enough about Cairo. So you went to work for Senator Simpson as a Pearson Fellow?

RATIGAN: A Pearson Fellow, right.

*Q: That is normally a one year detail.*

RATIGAN: Yes. You know I was the first consular officer ever to work on the immigration issues on the hill. A number of people followed me in that capacity but, not necessarily with Simpson, but I was the first one that had ever done this sort of thing.

*Q: When you say with Simpson that was actually with the judiciary committee or the Senate Immigration Subcommittee.*

RATIGAN: I was on the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the judiciary committee, and so I worked for the chief counsel of the subcommittee which was chaired by Simpson. Of course the chief counsel was a trusted friend of Simpson, a Wyoming lawyer who brought out by Simpson to basically keep him out of trouble on immigration which of course is a volatile issue.

*Q: That would be pretty hard to do. Senator Simpson at the time was chair of the subcommittee and also the full committee?*

RATIGAN: No, somebody else was Chair of the full Judiciary Committee.

*Q: Who was? Hatch?*

RATIGAN: Thurmond.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Because the Republicans controlled the Senate at that time.*

RATIGAN: Yes exactly.

*Q: So what did you do? Did you draft a lot or...*

RATIGAN: I began by attending the House-Senate conference on the '84 bill. I got there in the fall of '84 and they had passed the bill in both houses. Simpson and Mazzoli were very good legislators. Simpson was able to pass bills with like an 80 to 20 vote in this field which is to my mind amazing to get that much consensus. So anyway they were in conference. For me it was a wonderful thing because you saw all the major players for both the house and the senate lined up in open session day after day hammering away at these issues. Thurmond the chair, Rodino on the other side. But I think it was the Senate, in the chair of the conference Thurmond, Rodino on the other side. Mac Mathias was there and Barney Frank was a player. Chuck Schumer was in the house then. It was better than a TV show.

*Q: Was it an open session? Was the public there as well?*

RATIGAN: Yes.

*Q: C-SPAN?*

RATIGAN: Well maybe not. But all the lobbyists were there sort of floating around the room, or in and out. It was in a big committee room. It was a great show. You just saw all this byplay and people collected votes. One of the things that made an early impression on me was the whole Agricultural worker issue. Leon Panetta was representing his district in Northern California. He was there. He represented the growers in this particular situation. One of the things you learned pretty quickly was the tremendous power of not only California but also of course the agriculture lobby in this area. I mean California with 55 or 54 representatives at that time was one out of every eight members in the house. I

## Library of Congress

had no idea until then what power California had. Basically it was the power of the growers that was one of the huge reasons for this bill going down. My memory is a little imprecise about the details, but I remember that there were critical issues about what laws would apply to the growers and one of the big lessons I took away from that was the tremendous power of the growers.

*Q: Mazzoli was a Democrat or a Republican?*

RATIGAN: He was a Democrat from Louisville.

*Q: The house and Senate were in the hands of different parties that year?*

RATIGAN: Yes. Mazzoli was chairman of the House Immigration Subcommittee. He was working under Peter Rodino, who was Chairman of House Judiciary, someone for whom immigration had been a key issue for many years. So Mazzoli talked but Rodino controlled in many senses. In any case it was a fantastic introduction to the politics of immigration reform.

*Q: Ultimately in '84 no bill was...*

RATIGAN: The bill was killed. Then we began after a month or two we began to put together a new bill on the senate side. Mazzoli was doing the same on the house side. So we would work with the Immigration Service commissioner Al Nelson and his staff and so forth. They would come up and visit and we would take provisions from the old bill and add new ones and change things as things seemed to dictate and so forth. When I first came to the subcommittee as a State department detailee working in a pretty intensely political business, I found that Simpson's staff and the chief counsel in particular would sort of sniff you out, give you special projects and stuff and just try to get a sense if they could trust you. So that went on for probably a month or six weeks. They decided that they could trust me so I really became the same as any other staffer. It was all very quiet, not overt, nobody said anything, but my sense was that was the process. You know, some



## Library of Congress

state department guy was coming up there, and they had no idea who this person was and so forth.

*Q: did Senator Simpson or the counsel specifically ask for a state department officer with consular experience, also law experience or did you just get offered up and then get accepted by them.*

RATIGAN: I got offered up. Asencio sent one of his lieutenants whose name escapes me now, up to both Simpson and Mazzoli and started selling me I think. When I was in Cairo I got a call from Simpson's chief counsel a guy named Dick Day. We talked for, I don't know it seemed like a long time. Anyway he was obviously trying to get a sense of who I was and where I was and so forth. So I think that must have come after discussions with Asencio's assistant. But I know that Dick Day was very dubious of this idea of a State Department guy coming up there when it was first proposed. So the phone call was a key part of the process. But I was delighted that it worked out. I always loved it in the sense that Simpson was great fun to observe as a legislator, and I think the Senate is a simpler place to work than the house which is you know a very different culture and a very different set of rules. I will just say a word about Simpson as a legislator. I think he was an exceptionally good legislator, certainly as indicated by the number of votes he was able to put together for these bills. One of the ways that he did it was when people came to him with issues, things that they wanted to get done in the field of immigration, he would look at it, and if it didn't seem to be undermining the basic points of what he was trying to do he would take it in and they would get their vote, and he would get them committed to the bill as a whole. I know he did this with Mac Mathias. He did it with Specter, but also Democrats as well. So his basic philosophy was inclusivity and let's just build as big a coalition as we can.

One of the issues that we dealt with also in addition to putting together a new bill was the issue of refugees that was still, even in '84 basically five years after the exodus began from Vietnam, there were still major issues and major fights. When I was in Singapore I had

## Library of Congress

known the INS officer in charge, at that time the head INS officer for Southeast Asia was in Hong Kong, was a man named Joe Sureck. Sureck became the lightning rod for these issues because he was saying the definition of a refugee was someone who was outside of their country of origin and who was unwilling to return out of fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, national origin, politics, and one or two other factors. That was the definition in the law. It had to be persecution or a well founded fear of persecution. The people who were coming out in these boats as I saw in Singapore in the early 80's by and large had a very difficult time making a credible claim for a well founded fear of persecution. Nine times out of ten the government of Vietnam barely even knew they existed. You know they were not being persecuted, and Joe Sureck said so. He said, "These people are not refugees by any definition." The refugee advocate community just hated Joe Sureck. The INS community I think, applauded him because he was standing up for the law which is the only thing they work with. So when I got to Simpson's place, this dispute was still going on. The legal issue had been worked around by, so that they did not try to bring them in as legal refugees. They brought them in under what is called humanitarian parole which is an entirely different section of the law, sort of an entirely different process for them, slightly more burdensome process to get to ultimate refugee and green card status. So this battle was still going on. Sureck, as I said, I had known him in Singapore. He testified before the subcommittee at least once. It was a very emotional business. So that was a big part of our duties. I was there for one year '84 to the middle of '85. One of the other things that I got involved in while I was up there was fraudulent immigration related marriages. I had seen in both Tehran and Cairo fraudulent marriages used to gain green card status in the United States. One of the first cases I saw in Tehran was of a 19 year old man who married an 83 year old woman in Detroit. We had a system then, as every embassy did around the world, of sending back what are called blue sheets to INS saying this is not a bona fide situation or we think you should look into this and so forth. I remember sending back a blue sheet saying we think this is highly unlikely to be a bona fide marriage. We never got any answer. The answer we always got when you talked to INS people was we really have no effective way to deal with it. So when I went

## Library of Congress

up to the subcommittee, one of the things I began to realize I might be able to bring to people's attention was the issue of fraudulent marriages and what could be done about it. I had seen the same in Egypt. There was a whole ring based in New Jersey where you would give a woman \$2,000 and a free trip to Egypt to come out and visit Egypt for a week or two or whatever, marry an Egyptian man, and apply for the green card. So you would see these young American women coming into the consular section with their new Egyptian spouses. The woman spoke English and the husband spoke Arabic. They had no common language but they would have some guy from the service that set this marriage up translating for them, and it was pretty obvious what was going on. Ultimately we found out what the dollar amount was. When I was on the subcommittee, we had a hearing on marriage fraud, which I set up. I talked to people in INS and talked to people who had been involved with this problem. I managed to come across a woman, an American woman who had been duped into marriage, convinced by some guy that he loved her. So we got her to testify. Anyway, Simpson was not a man who held publicity type hearings. We did basically academic-educational type hearings. But we did this one. I talked to an INS guy in Philadelphia who had a Filipino marriage broker. So between the duped American woman and the Filipino marriage broker who was the sort of classic sleazy guy, we got so much media. It was on 60 Minutes and all the morning talk shows, Good Morning America and all that stuff. This duped American woman could really talk. So she was on all the shows. So the hearing generated a lot of interest, but Simpson didn't want to do a bill. He said, "Look I have got enough on my plate. I don't want to take this on. It is too emotional as it is," and so forth. So he offered it to Paul Simon who was of a different party, also a member of the subcommittee, and I think interested in doing something. So Simon grabbed it. I know his staff told me later that he got more mail on marriage fraud than on any issue he dealt with that entire year. So he sponsored the bill. I basically wrote it, and it passed in 1986 after I had left.

*Q: It doesn't have your name on it.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: No it doesn't. But when I went back in '89 and even in '95, I was known among the staffers who handle immigration issues as the marriage fraud guy. And I would get calls referred to me, etc.

*Q: You mentioned that one of the early challenges you had with the chief counsel of the subcommittee working for Simpson was the process of establishing trust, that they could trust you. Which to me raises a question I would like to ask which is to what extent did you feel responsible, loyal, feel that you needed to keep in touch with your office of consular affairs at the department? They sort of sponsored you; they sent you up there; they arranged it. How did you handle that?*

RATIGAN: It was a very odd issue, difficult issue. I was up there three different times. One in '84-'85, again in '89 for just two or three months at Simpson's request, and I went back in '95-'96 again at Simpson's request. I was always surprised that nobody asked me to come back and brief anybody. Nobody asked me to come back and talk to a brown bag lunch. Nobody asked me to stick this into the bill which they certainly could have done. I kind of felt that I should not be soliciting this sort of contact, but I was surprised that it didn't come, either from CA or from H. I mean the longer I worked up there I had a very close relationship with Dick Day. They were very open. Simpson was very open to this stuff and certainly very open to working with the department. I am sure the Department had visa-related issues they wanted to address, and in fact I did manage to include some technical things that I thought would be helpful to the consular process. But if they had wanted to put stuff into that bill just get a readout on what was going on — they could have done it easily. I mean we used to do brown bag lunches in the consular function for the Washington people. I mean it would have been a natural to do something like that. I didn't know Asencio so well, but I knew the people around him. It just never happened. Let me just go on a bit about this because I think it is something that has some interest. So I never went back. I was just amazed. Really I never got any calls or inquiries about what does it look like or what is the status or even can you do this? When I was there, and the last

## Library of Congress

time I was there, I think it was the last timin '95-96 — we came down to renewing the visa waiver bill. The visa waiver was always called a pilot program. It was called the VWPP, Visa Waiver Pilot Program, with the idea that it was always kind of on probation. So we came to the point I think it was in '95-'96 that we wanted to authorize it permanently. So one provision was that countries could be put on the visa waiver list by INS in concurrence with the State Department. They could be taken off by INS in concurrence with the state department. When it came time for permanent renewal I said to the chief counsel that I could not think of a situation in the department in which any country desk or country that was on the visa waiver list, or any regional bureau, would authorize the removal of a country from the visa waiver list.” So I suggested that as far as taking countries off the list was concerned this authority be given to INS only. So that is the way it went into the law. The State Department wasn't happy. Phyllis Oakley who I think was head of Congressional Relations at the time came up and talked to Dick Day about it and brought somebody else, I can't remember who it was. So obviously my allegiance in that situation I thought was to the immigration laws and not so much to the department. You know in my own justification I suppose I felt like the department's judgment or policy decisions were skewed by factors that they probably shouldn't be skewed by. But I made that kind of judgment and I came down on the side of what I thought was best for the immigration laws and most in the national interest rather than what was best for the department, or what the department thought was best anyway. So that is what I did. I run into Phyllis sometimes at functions since then. She is a nice woman but I always felt like I get a distinctly frosty reception.

*Q: You think she remembers.*

RATIGAN: Oh yeah I do. It was a tough choice, but I have never regretted making that recommendation.

*Q: I wonder if it is partly a function of the way the department approaches congressional legislative issues. There is of course, an office of congressional relations or legislative liaison which at times over the years has not been very happy to have either geographic*

## Library of Congress

*or functional bureaus dealing directly with the congress, feeling that everything ought to be routed through them, but they have limited ability to handle everything, and some things just get neglected. It also may be partly a matter in this particular case of immigration legislation and the consular bureau that the consular bureau is reluctant to take a position on the drafting or deliberative stage until something is actually enacted.*

RATIGAN: More on that later.

*Q: Yeah and I suspect you were not unique in this sense. I mean the Pearson program is an old program that has placed people not only in the congress but elsewhere as well. I think many of them over the years have felt they have almost severed their tie, that there wasn't a place that they could relate and hook into the department, and they were, therefore they were pretty much on their own to use their experience and their best judgment. Nobody as going to kind of be interested in doing or tell them what to do. It sounds like that was your experience, this first assignment. This other too that you spoke of is a little bit different probably. We will come to those later. Does that make sense what I am saying?*

RATIGAN: It does. At some point whether now or later I would like to get back to this because I think the whole question you suggest of kind of what the department, how it sees its relationship with the hill and what use it makes of the people who has this experience on the hill is interesting. At one point I suggested to George Vest when he was Director General of personnel when I got back. I said, You know, "H" should have the right of first refusal on these people when they come back from the hill whether it is with the American Political Science Association or the Pearson fellowships. The department ought to have the right to utilize that experience if you are making a gift of this assignment to these people for a year.

*Q: In fact I don't think it has ever worked out that way.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: No, I don't think it has.

*Q: Normally it doesn't work that way. Normally when they are on a Pearson on the hill their next assignment is somewhere completely separate, not in the congressional relations office.*

RATIGAN: Yes, I agree. I am not sure but practically there would have been some sort of way to implement first refusal. But part of the problem is that officers do not regard Congressional Relations as a career-enhancing job, and since many of them have other assignment options, they don't normally go to "H". But I think the Department is probably the loser for it. The Department has in my experience very seldom been comfortable or confident in its relations with the Hill, and I think the lack of officers in those jobs who have a strong knowledge of both the Hill and the Department is one of the reasons why. One way to make more effective use of the talents that officers develop up there would be to make a Congressional fellowship a two year assignment, one year on the Hill and one year working for H. That wouldn't be unduly burdensome, and I would think might hold significant benefits for the Department.

*Q: After your one year with the Senate immigration subcommittee, did you return to the Department?*

RATIGAN: Yes, I took an assignment in the Bureau of Refugee Affairs, where I was in charge of ensuring that funds spent by the U.S. government for the care and maintenance of refugees in Asia were well spent, and were not being wasted. I had two principal refugee populations that I was responsible for, the Indochinese in Southeast Asia and the Afghans in Pakistan. I did a lot of traveling in this job, and met with a both American contractors that the Refugee Bureau had contracted with such as Catholic relief services or the Lutheran immigration and refugee services, the International Rescue Committee, based in New York, etc. They provided a lot of the basic services in the refugee camps in both Southeast Asia and Pakistan. I also met with officials of international



## Library of Congress

organizations who provided basic services, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Food Program (WFP). My job was to ensure that the US government's money was being well spent, that refugees were adequately housed and fed, etc. So I would visit the camps, talk to refugees and staff, etc. It was a very interesting job, especially in Pakistan, where some of the camps were very remote, without any food or water nearby, and where the refugees themselves, from Afghanistan, had in many cases never seen a doctor before, etc. As much as I enjoyed my time on the Hill, this may have been an even more interesting job. I came to have an appreciation for the tremendous work that these private and international organizations do the work of the WFP in providing food to more than 100,000 people in the very remote areas of southern Pakistan which became more famous when we became militarily involved in Afghanistan has never been given the credit it deserves, I think. And there are plenty of other instances as well. But you also learn that a refugee is often not just a refugee; that a refugee can also be a "freedom fighter" at night, at Site Two, for example, in Thailand, right on the Cambodian border. There were often nighttime raids into Cambodia from Site Two. Or one might be a "freedom fighter" in Afghanistan but then walk out to a refugee camp in Pakistan. I went to a camp in southern Pakistan where every male was dressed in a long white robe (the women were nowhere to be seen, but they were there), and I was told that under that robe, or at the least very nearby, everyone of those men had at least one rifle. We saw this of course in "Charlie Wilson's War," so that a refugee situation is often a highly complex one, not as simple as the word implies.

*Q: So one of the function of your job was to provide documentation of the performance of these refugee-support organizations, to get budget appropriations for U.S. support for these various organizations.*

RATIGAN: Right. We had established a sort of base line of information that we could use in saying so and so isn't doing a good job or they are having problems at site 2 in Thailand or Peshawar or where ever it is of this kind or with water or they are having food delivery problems or whatever it is. And to tell my superiors and say to the organization we need



## Library of Congress

to focus on this problem or that problem and so forth. So as I say, I traveled a great deal, visiting camps in very remote areas of Thailand or Malaysia or Pakistan, etc. I took one around the world trip of just over 30 days, when I began in Japan talking with the Foreign Ministry about their level of contributions to the UN organizations (the Japanese have traditionally been very generous donors in the refugee area), and then went on to visit the camps Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, then went on for a week at the camps in both Northwest Pakistan, near Peshawar, and in the south, in Baluchistan, and then talked with the Foreign Ministry about the government's reaction to these camps. I finished up in Geneva talking to UNHCR and several other organizations there before coming home. But yes it was our job to sort of assess what was successful and what was failing and whose word we could trust in some situations.

*Q: Just to finish up on this trip you talked about, you were not able at that particular time to visit Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia?*

RATIGAN: No. There were no refugee camps in any of those countries, and so I had no work reason to try to visit them. There might have been a reason for someone to visit Vietnam to get a better understanding of what was generating these refugee flows, but that was not part of my job description. But certainly I was also in camps in Thailand that are about as close to both Cambodia and Laos as possible. I already briefly mentioned Site 2, which was a very large and important camp right on the Thai border with Cambodia. There were other camps further north in Thailand that were right on the border with Laos. You can see that again on the map there. A place called Ban Vinai where the Hmong were coming out of Laos, and of course the Hmong eventually developed into a very contentious political issue later on simply because, well in part because they elicited tremendous support from people who had worked with them in the war. I talked to senate and house staffers who were Vietnam War veterans and they just got passionate on the subject of the Hmong and the need to bring them in and take care of them. But as you may know the great majority couldn't read or write any known language. They couldn't write a known language, so they had serious resettlement problems, and also problems when

## Library of Congress

they sought to qualify for citizenship. When I was later up on the hill there were serious issues about whether they could qualify for citizenship because most of them couldn't read or write English. There were several bills and amendments introduced to waive that requirement for the Hmong, and a lot of back and forth on that issue. Eventually I think it kind of got gummed around and things were resolved. They did become citizens. The ironic part is I grew up in Minnesota in St. Paul, and Minnesota and St. Paul are one of the principal resettlement sites for Hmong — and for whatever reason, why anyone would think they would do well in St. Paul I don't know being with the cold winters and all that sort of thing, but I think it was the Lutherans that just took that in hand and said we are going to do this. It has turned out tremendously successfully. The Hmong are usually among the valedictorians of all the high schools. It has been a real success story in St. Paul. The parents still operate their gardens and sell at the farmers markets and make do. Most of them have not bolted for California at the first cold weather, as many expected they would. They have stuck it out now for obviously 30 years, and it has worked out very well.

*Q: Now you have talked some about your role and involvement with refugee camps, handling refugees by the international committee of the Red Cross, by UNHCR, by the private voluntary organizations. To what extent did your whole office get involved in the question of resettlement in the United States or admission to the U.S.?*

RATIGAN: We didn't do anything with it in the part of the Bureau I was in, which was called Refugee Assistance, I believe. But certainly the refugee bureau did. The other side of the Bureau did: that was called Refugee Admissions. The Admissions side decided who the U.S. could admit, made sure they filled or tried to fill the annual quotas set by the House and Senate each year, etc. And then once a refugee was admitted, there was an additional process, which was mainly contracted out, of providing resettlement assistance, deciding where they would live in the U.S., providing assistance, etc. There is a whole office, and I think it is in HHS, ORR the Office of Refugee Resettlement, that handles the sort of physical details of that sort of work and of course there are quite a number of American private volunteer agencies who contract with them and resettle,

## Library of Congress

the IRC, International Rescue Committee that I mentioned, and the Lutherans, the Catholics, Catholic Relief. So Admissions is conducted within the Refugee Bureau, but the resettlement itself, and the assistance that goes with it, is contracted out.

*Q: Why don't you talk a little bit more about the office of Asian refugees in the refugee bureau. How big was your office; who did you report to; how did you relate to the East Asian/Pacific bureau? Talk a little bit more about the bureaucratic context.*

RATIGAN: The refugee bureau was still at that time, it still is I guess, almost always headed by a political appointee at the assistant secretary level. The deputy assistant secretaries, perhaps I should say we had the obligatory political appointment, but also and in some other cases they were political appointees as well. There was a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Assistance, who was my boss on the assistance side of the refugee bureau. There was a second DAS for Admissions, and there was a Principal DAS, who was the Assistant Secretary's (or Refugee Coordinator, as he or she was known) principal deputy and handled the more political, less technical matters. My boss was a political appointee, and this was in the Reagan administration. But I must say he was not a very political person. He never tried to introduce any sort of ideology into any of these issues, and I think largely for that reason but also for his personal qualities was very well regarded in the refugee community. I am referring to Gene Dewey. Then later on, Gene left and my boss became Frances Cook, who of course was a career foreign service officer, a former colleague when I was in Cairo. Frances was the consul general in Alexandria. So in other words that deputy assistant secretary position kind of got depoliticized.

*Q: Later on she was an ambassador in Africa and I think in the middle east also. I think she was in Qatar, as well as Cameroon.*

RATIGAN: I knew she was in Africa, yes. I should mention that because I was responsible for refugee assistance in Asia, which included Indo-China, I regularly sat in on the East Asia bureau weekly staff meetings, chaired normally by the Assistant Secretary. The two

## Library of Congress

Assistant Secretaries during my time were Gaston Sigur and Paul Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz has since become a well known name, but I will say that I have always thought of him as one of the most capable and most impressive people I have ever come in contact with. A very decent guy, who established an open and collegial atmosphere and you didn't have to spend much time with him to see how totally on top of things he was. I would say, too, that in my time on the Hill, I saw him testify on several occasions, and I always thought he was one of the best, if not the best, State Department witnesses I ever saw there. State Department witnesses often give the appearance of being very determined to stay within the guidance, sometimes a bit nervous about taking questions, etc. But Wolfowitz always gave the impression of welcoming questions. He would pull down his glasses, look the Senator in the eye and call him or her by name, and just start talking. It certainly looked as though he simply was talking to the Senator, and not trying to parrot any sort of memorized Q and A. As a result, I always thought he came across as highly credible. So, that was a bit of a digression, but I did sit in on the EAP staff meetings, and that was the leadership structure in the RP Bureau.

*Q: How big was your office?*

RATIGAN: Yeah, our office was, I was the chief and then I had a deputy. I had a Pakistan person. We had a real all star team, I must say. Lisa Carty was the Pakistan person. Lisa was an outstanding office who later married Bill Burns who was assistant secretary for near east affairs.

*Q: Currently ambassador to Russia.*

RATIGAN: Then my Indo China person was Nancy Powell who also of course, went on to great things in South Asia. So I was very fortunate in having two exceptional officers handling the two regions that I was responsible for. I think the Refugee Bureau is a bit unusual in that it sometimes attracts people who are highly motivated in wanting to be of assistance to people such as refugees. In fact I would say there is no doubt about it:

## Library of Congress

RP, as it was called, Refugee Programs, was able to attract quite a number of very highly motivated officers and staff.

*Q: Later she was ambassador to Uganda, Ghana, Pakistan, and is now in Nepal.*

RATIGAN: Nepal, yes. Actually I have some friends in Nepal who have run into her. So Nancy was terrific, and so was Lisa. I just basically got out of the way and let Lisa and Nancy perform. So it was a pleasure to work in that office. We had a lot of fun, and a high degree of esprit.

*Q: Did you, you mentioned going to Geneva in terms of the role of refugee assistance well at the various UN and international bodies. Was one of your responsibilities to attend board meetings or meetings where they would discuss policies and what to do?*

RATIGAN: Sort of. I would attend various donors meetings or conferences. I was not the senior State Department person at these meetings, but they were held both to develop financial plan and donor commitment for funding these programs, but also to review and discuss policies. With Pakistan, for example, there was a donors conference for the refugee issues, and some thoughtful soul decided the best way to hold it would be in Paris. I forget exactly how it came about, but Dean Hinton was the head of the U.S. delegation to the donor's conference. I don't know where he would have been at that time.

*Q: Well possibly IN IO at the OECD. Could that have been?*

RATIGAN: I certainly could. Was he in Paris?

*Q: We had a separate mission and representation.*

RATIGAN: Maybe that was it and maybe HCR held it in Paris but Hinton was the designated chief of the delegation.

## Library of Congress

*Q: And also as part of the OECD delegation there is the advisory committee that he would have represented the United States on. That may have been what happened. He may have come from somewhere else. Anyway, go ahead.*

RATIGAN: Well I discovered among other things that he loves oysters as much as I do. We had a chance to test a number of different kinds of oysters. This was April in Paris and it was a very good time. The conference went on for probably the better part of a week, and my recollection was that it was quite well attended and quite well subscribed.

*Q: How about your relations with the international organizations. You know IO. Of course they get involved with a lot of UN organizations including funding. Did they do a lot in this area or pretty much leave it up to the refugee bureau?*

RATIGAN: I went up to New York at least once, maybe twice, I don't remember, and went to the UN mission office there and to the UN on refugee business. I think we were in the economic and social council. I went whenever there were issues that came up regarding either Indo China or Pakistan. My recollection was that there was a guy in the mission who represented the U.S. at these meetings, and I kind of went along as a substantive resource providing specific information and that sort of thing. But they were awfully low key. I don't remember having much of a clear recollection of any meetings that were really terribly substantive or decisive or anything. It was kind of well to day is Thursday. We kind of have to do Pakistan today. Nothing really very definitive seemed to happen.

*Q: To what extent did you get involved with the seventh floor, the secretary or any of the principals. Did that happen occasionally or rarely or not at all to your recollection?*

RATIGAN: I personally don't think I ever did. These issues, the refugee issues were perking along no only on the admission side but of course there were all the ongoing issues of getting the Russians out of Afghanistan and support for Afghan rebels. So I think we certainly wrote briefing materials for secretaries when they traveled. And the bureau, it

## Library of Congress

was still as I say a hot political topic. I think the kind of briefing materials I did it was fairly far down the chain as far as direct contact with the seventh floor on this.

*Q: You mentioned site 2 in Thailand and the Cambodian refugees which wore a dual hat so to speak in that they were also rebels. Presumably that was also the case in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. Did the refugee bureau sort of turn a blind eye to that, or were you concerned, or was this an issue that really wasn't an issue.*

RATIGAN: I think it was largely a blind eye because everyone, and I mean not only the department and the refugee bureau and also the private voluntary agencies, all the sort of fund raising that needed to be done for these programs were sort of premised on the idea that refugees were noble creatures. I don't mean to imply that they are not, but I mean the sort of dual nature of these problems didn't get much recognition. The way it did come up was usually down played in our public statements. I think a lot of it was just related to complications in the funding process.

*Q: OK, anything else you want to say about your period '85 to '87 in the refugee bureau?*

RATIGAN: I don't think so.

*Q: All right, where did you go next?*

RATIGAN: While I was in the refugee bureau I interviewed with Jane Coon who was I think the dean of the school of professional studies at FSI. I was wanting to be the director of Con Gen Rosslyn, the consular training operation at the Foreign Service Institute. I did do that and went and spent the years from '87 to '89 as director of what was called Con Gen Rosslyn. It was about this time in my career when I started becoming, having responsibility for a lot of junior officers. This was the first assignment where I really met and got to know and did some teaching of the new officers. That was a very attractive part of the job. One of the things we did that I thought was useful was first of all in the aftermath of the '86

## Library of Congress

immigration act we had to rewrite basically all the instructional manuals dealing with visas, some of them extensively, some of them not so much.

*Q: The manuals that govern consular work in the field or training manuals or both.*

RATIGAN: Well the training manuals. Thank God other people in the visa bureau, the consular bureau, were rewriting the actual manuals that govern what people do in the field. But we had to rewrite the training manuals that we used for non immigrant visas, and for immigrant visas, for basically everything related to visas in the training we provided primarily to junior officers who are about to go out in the field. That was a big project, but again I thought we had some excellent staff, and we did that without too much disruption. I think I did a lot of it in part because I had some background from my work on the hill, but also because I was the person who could be most easily spared. We had about five or six officers. I think I had a deputy and then we had about four or five '03 level officers who were in class every day teaching the material that we were then rewriting.

*Q: All of them were foreign service officers who had consular experience.*

RATIGAN: Yes. Then the other thing I did that had not been done before was to introduce a training module on how to interview people for visas. It seemed like that was something that needed to be addressed, so we did address it. I might mention that when I testified before the House Immigration Subcommittee that was looking into the problems that led to 9/11, and about the fact that U.S. visa officers had issued visas to so many of the terrorists, one thing they asked about was whether there was ever any training in how to interview a visa applicant. I was very gratified that I could say that I had introduced such training, and that it was part of the standard training process. And we also had an advanced consular course in which we brought in I guess '03 or '02 level officers, kind of a prep course for grander responsibilities. I was very much involved with that, and we had some outside speakers. We had facilitators of the kind that are well known at FSI, outside trainers and so forth to run these courses.



## Library of Congress

*Q: The advanced consular course, how long was that?*

RATIGAN: I think about two weeks. It was a great way for me to meet up and coming young consular officers, me as someone who was going to be in need of their services in the future. So I met quite a number of people who I later worked with and basically selected them overseas on the basis of what I knew. One of the things that I did for the advanced consular course which we later integrated into the general, anyway I created an exercise involving, kind of line a war game, involving a plane crash and what you have to do as a consular officer when there is a plane crash, who you have to contact and all that sort of thing, sort of drawn out through a series of phases as you do in a war game. So that was fun. We took that overseas the air crash exercise when we did workshops overseas. We were fairly successful in getting money for these workshops because Con Gen Rosslyn had been doing consular workshops overseas for quite a number of years. We had FSN's come in for one week. We would go to a place that was cheap, say Bangkok or something like that. We would have the FSN's from around the region come in for a week and then the officers for a week. They would all get a chance to compare notes at how they were handling common problems at their posts. So that was something I think those things are generally useful.

*Q: I think the advanced consular course you were starting was in some way a partial replacement for the mid level course which was about six months. It had been abolished in about '85-'86.*

RATIGAN: I think it was a replacement in some way for the mid-level course. I want to say we did these courses twice a year but I am not positive about that. I think we maybe did one in the spring and one in the fall.

*Q: And then took elements of it to the consular workshops you did abroad.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Right. We had about 20 people in each class. You know, we tried to make it not just dreary lecturing. We tried to make it as hands on. We did visits to the INS forensic lab which they had capacities to do some really quite fantastic stuff as far as determining what is a bogus passport and what isn't and why and phony visas and all that sort of thing. Whatever specifics there may have been it certainly gave the officers an idea of how to approach these sorts of problems and what resources there were back in the States. Days out are always more fun than just sitting around talking. So we tried to do as much of that as we could.

*Q: Let me go back to the basic consular officer training again just for a minute. I think it is probably safe to say in this period while you were doing thins, '87-'89, probably virtually every junior officer entering the foreign service after their A-100 orientation training would go through Con Gen Rosslyn. That was about three weeks or so, four weeks maybe, and it was sort of modular so it wouldn't be a class, it would continuous intake, and they would kind of move around and do different things.*

RATIGAN: Exactly right. I think it was about 17 or 18 days. I think we started out maybe at about 16 days and we added an interviewing module and that took it out to about 18 days. But each unit, and I think we probably had about, I don't know if there were five, anyway we had four or five units of students, and they would simply rotate, and each unit had its own instructor on non immigrants, and immigrants, citizenship and passports and American citizens and then maybe interviewing was the fifth and some how fit. Then they would move just from one unit to another in groups of about half a dozen .

*Q: The effort was to have experiential hands on as much as possible as opposed to just working with a written manual which is what I remember back when I did consular training. It was primarily trying to memorize the law and its provisions and so on.*

RATIGAN: I remember too. Not only the department I was in tremendous debt to a man named John Coffman who at some point or other I would say about 10 years before I

## Library of Congress

got there really redesigned this whole course along this modular line to make it as you say experiential, although on the interviewing side, the students would interview each other and there would be all kinds of role playing. The manuals were basically sort of workbooks, and you would get cases posed to you as the son of a Bulgarian mother and a Swiss father applying for an immigrant visa. Practical situations. Of course we were always on the lookout for new and interesting cases and solicited officers in the field to send in cases, and they did. We would integrate from time to time into new materials, but it was the case study method essentially imported into the consular function and as I say thank God it really made the process more palatable.

*Q: I think the visa interview exercise was an important contribution because certainly all visa officers that is the bread and butter, and probably some of them are comfortable and could do it easily. I mean there are foreign language issues as well, but putting those aside, I would think for some people just gaining a little confidence by trying it out and trying different techniques probably helped them a lot when they actually had to do it with real applicants.*

RATIGAN: I hope so. As I mentioned it did become something of an issue in the aftermath of 9-11. But as you say, interviewing is absolutely the bread and butter of the visa process, and the more officers can get some idea of how to go about it, the better we have done our job as trainers.

*Q: The other aspect of Con Gen Rosslyn that is sort of famous or infamous is the mock jail. The junior officers in training learned to help an American detainee. Do you want to say anything about the value of that? Was that your idea?*

RATIGAN: No it certainly wasn't but at the time I was there it was, you know we tended to hoke it up and everyone kind of hoked it up a little bit. What I remember was basically a room the size of a large broom closet with the walls painted black, and all kinds of people would take turns putting their own graffiti on the walls. There was a single overhead

## Library of Congress

spotlight. The students had to go and sort of sit in the jail and people would come in and interview them. So everyone got a big bang out of doing that. But at the same time, certainly based on my experience overseas it is good training in the sense that you are not shocked when you go into those jails and see some of those grim conditions. You get an idea in advance of the kind of privation that people have and you have some idea of what to try and bring them if you are going to try and bring them anything.

*Q: Ok, anything else about the training?*

RATIGAN: While I was there at Con Gen I also had a chance to serve on a promotion panel, the only one that I did serve on, but I found that to be a fascinating process. I am sure you have got all kinds of memoirs and reminiscences of people on panels. This panel did not have any particular outstanding stories. It was I thought a good process. I came away from that with confidence in the fairness of the process. I don't really have any specific comments, but it was a very good part of my foreign service experience and one that I enjoyed.

*Q: When you were at the Foreign Service Institute from '87 to '89 we were still in several inadequate buildings in the Rosslyn section of Arlington. But I think a decision in principle had been made to move to this location in Arlington Hall on a new campus. Were you involved at all in the discussion about the requirements for the consular training function?*

RATIGAN: Absolutely. I spent a lot of time with a woman named Cathy Russell who followed this program you know the construction and design from start to finish and I know from what I read was a tremendously valuable part of the process. Anyway I spent a lot of time with Cathy and with other people as well, trying to design the consular space they had already blocked out, where the space was going to be and how much of it there was going to be. We drew boxes here and there and allocated space from one function to another. I mean it was the kind of thing where you wish gee I really wish I could be there when this ultimately happened.

## Library of Congress

*Q: You were probably looking for a broom closet space for the jail, and maybe a couple of windows for visa interviews.*

RATIGAN: Definitely the visa windows,. I can't remember what but I am sure we hoked up the jail in the new space pretty close to as much as we did in the old space.

*Q: It is still there, I know that. OK, anything else about that period?*

RATIGAN: I don't think so.

*Q: Well where did you go from there, FSI?*

RATIGAN: After FSI I went to Toronto. I will just briefly say that I had applied to be the deputy in Manila. I felt I needed some large post experience at this point in my career and so I applied to be the number two guy in Manila. It was a senior position and I was still an '01. They decided I was a good fit for that in Manila. They told me, the admin consular in Manila told me no problem we will get you across the senior threshold and all that stuff as far as the assignment process goes. Well the assignment blew up over the issues of assigning someone across the threshold to the senior service.

*Q: A so called stretch assignment.*

RATIGAN: A stretch assignment, yes. So I was left in about April or May of '89 with no assignment. But something opened up in Toronto at that time, so I ended up going to Toronto in the fall of '89 and it turned out well for me. I worked for a man named John Hall who was the CG in Toronto at the time.

*Q: Before we get to Toronto, I notice your little outline says you were detailed back to the immigration subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary. Do you want to say a word about that? That was a matter of months I assume.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Yes. It was. Whatever the transition was I think I finished up at Con Gen in about June and...

*Q: You didn't need language training for Toronto.*

RATIGAN: No. So anyway Senator Simpson's subcommittee on immigration, they were still in the majority I think, and so Senator Simpson wrote a letter to Secretary Shultz asking that I be detailed up to the immigration subcommittee staff for a couple of months. In particular they were preparing a new bill. This was in '89. The bill ultimately became the Immigration Act of 1990 which was a pretty major piece of legislation. But what I worked on at that time was grounds of ineligibility. There were a number of issues in the area of ineligible categories that had been kind of festering for a long time. One of them was the whole Communist business. You know the Soviet Union had just fallen and there was all that sort of political developments. We looked kind of ridiculous to have so much of the old cold war kind of language in the visa laws' grounds of ineligibility as we did, so there was broad interest in the Congress in revising the grounds of ineligibility for that reason and several others. It had been a long time since anyone had looked at the grounds of ineligibility. So I spent most of the two months roughly that I had up there working on new ground of ineligibility. Of course AIDS and homosexuality were other grounds that were very controversial. The law was very confused in that area. Actually there were two different areas. There were a number of other things, so we on Senator Simpson's subcommittee staff worked on that project among others. I left in the fall of '89, and I believe that Heather Hodges came out and took my place with Senator Simpson, or with Dick Day and the staff. I remember walking through the leaves up on the hill with Heather talking about some of these ineligibility issues. They did pass a pretty consensus, a pretty broadly agreed upon consensus about ineligibility issues in the 1990 act which was quite useful.

*Q: So you went up to Toronto, You were the chief of the consular section. This was 1989. there was a consul general named John Hall you said who was an economic commercial*

## Library of Congress

*officer by background. I assume the consular section of Toronto is a pretty big part of that post.*

RATIGAN: It is. What did we have we probably had close to 15 officers.

*Q: In the consular section alone.*

RATIGAN: Twelve, fourteen, fifteen something like that. Anyway it was a good size. It was by far the biggest thing I had done to date as far as supervisory duties.

*Q: Probably many of them were first tour.*

RATIGAN: Yes. You know I mentioned earlier that Con Gen Rosslyn was the beginning of the time when I spent, call it mentoring or whatever, but I spent a lot of time supervising junior officers. We saw, since Canadians don't need visas, our visa clientele was people from everywhere but Canada. So it was from that point of view a more interesting visa experience I think than most other visa posts provide. We saw bundles of Russians because Russia was going to hell at that time. A lot of chaos over there.

*Q: But they were able to get to Canada.*

RATIGAN: They were able to get to Canada. I never knew quite how. So we were regularly in contact with the consulates in Moscow and St. Petersburg and so forth about these Russians we were seeing. You know you just saw a wide variety of people from around the world, I will just spend a little more time. Toronto is a kind of vestibule to the United States. Well Canada is but Toronto in particular was a place where people could go to get sort of last chance visa opportunities. So we would get, and of course there were people coming up out of the States. So you saw a fair number of unusual cases. We saw, for example, we had visits from both Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones because their drug convictions made them ineligible, and they had to get waivers and so on, so they came to Toronto.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Came from where, the U.S.?*

RATIGAN: I think they came from abroad, from presumably London but it could have been almost anywhere. It was kind of interesting. I will just take a brief time to say that Mick Jagger couldn't have been more charming. He came in and signed. All the FSNs knew he was coming in. He came not in a waiting room but behind the glass and so forth, and the FSN's were ready for him and they had record albums and clothing and everything you could imagine. He just couldn't have been more charming. Keith Richard the guitarist couldn't have been more the opposite. He looked like he was still in a drug daze and didn't spend really any time. He had a "manager", my sole recollection of it was she had about the shortest skirt I have ever seen. She ran around and did business for Keith Richard and he waited in somebody's office. Somebody's dark office I will say. So we had a number of kind of unusual things like that.

*Q: You mentioned that some people came from the U.S. to get a, to regularize their status?*

RATIGAN: There has been a long standing practice about people whose visas run out or who change status or whatever. We had a number of hockey players who would come up and get their visas to go in and play. Some of the Czechs or Poles or Russians I suppose whose visas we couldn't issue for more than a year or something like that. They had to do this almost every year. So we saw a fair number of this. So for all of these people who wanted to come up or come to Toronto for a visa we had an appointment system. There was an 800 or a 900 number you would call and get an appointment and pay for it and come in. We, to carry on a little bit more about that, we had problems making the facilities which were probably 60 years old, many decades old in Toronto. A great location right on University Blvd, but out of date. So one of the things that we did was to rent a trailer and bring the trailer right into the parking lot behind the consulate general. So we got the trailer and took it off its wheels and set it right down there and it gave us basically three additional windows to do whatever we needed to do with visa applicants. It got a little



## Library of Congress

cold in the winter, but on the other hand the volume wasn't as great either. When they finally took the trailer out of there, one of the FSNs showed me, sent me the photographs of the trailer leaving the parking lot. So it was there for quite awhile, and served a very useful purpose in helping us to adapt the space to our needs, for maybe ten years or so. I had a couple of other things that I might just say about living in Canada. It was a bit of a shock to me. Well there were a number of things, but it was probably the most. We rented a house on a block, my wife and I, that was probably where we still have friends. We made wonderful friends there. We still go back. We just got an invitation to their annual block party cum golf tournament. This was 10-12 years later. It was a great experience in that sense, but also I mean Canadian, so many Americans who haven't been there think oh Canadians are just like us. They are definitely not just like us. They don't appreciate our saying so. One of the best books I ever read on this subject was a book called "Why We Act Like Canadians" by a French Canadian named Pierre Berton. It just tells why Canadians are different and why they react differently to things than we do. It is very good. I always recommend it to people, new officers or just friends or whoever just plans to go up there. I won't try to summarize his points but it is definitely a different experience. You see it every day when you wake up and as I did went out to the front step and hauled in the Toronto Star. The Star is an eminently more readable paper than the Globe and Mail which is probably a better paper but not nearly as interesting. The Toronto Star found a way literally every day to take a whack at Americans. It got to be a pain. You just realized there is a different point of view on these things. When we first met our landlady, for instance, we had not been talking with our landlady for more than ten minutes at the most before the subject of the War of 1812 came up. The Canadians are still upset that basically we took a swipe at Toronto in the war of 1812 and weren't very nice to them. So along that same general line when I was there and John Hall was still the CG, we had a call one day from a U.S. military fort at Fort Drum in upstate New York right near the Canadian border. We didn't get a call, actually I think it was a cable. The Fort Drum PR people said we have got a request from Canadian television channel to bring a reporter and a camera man down to Fort Drum so they can interview the commandant and take pictures of the place

## Library of Congress

that will be the jumping off point for the U.S. invasion of Canada. The request was I mean from all that we could determine the request was made in seriousness, and certainly the fort was taking it seriously. You know I think there is some background around Fort Drum and certainly areas around upstate New York in terms of military planning going back 200 years or something. This just came out of the blue, and I think John Hall basically said, "Tell them very nicely to get lost. We are not going to host a reporter," I forget the exact advice. But the fact that the request for guidance command had to be sent — was indicative of some of the sensibilities that still go on up there. And then the first Iraq war went on when I was up there. Just about the time that it began the CG got contacted, this was Mike Durkee at the time who succeeded John Hall. He received a call from the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police about security. They had observed and even arrested some people who were looking at license numbers and license plates and so forth in the parking lot of the U.S. embassy in Ottawa. So the RCMP was concerned that there was going to be retaliation against the United States in Canada. So Mike Durkee basically had an RCMP bodyguard around the clock 24 hours. I think it was just one person, but there may have been a driver. Anyway Mike was fully covered. They assigned an RCMP car to basically sit outside of my house, our house 24 hours a day. Of course I went to work on my own, but the house was there. So of course this kind of made us rock stars in the neighborhood. But the only unusual incident that occurred was one night we decided to order pizza for dinner, so the pizza man shows up and comes up to the house and rings the doorbell and so forth. I came to the door and paid him. I am kind of looking over his shoulder and he has no idea why. He turned around and sees this Mountie who was really quite big. I think his eyes got about that big. It was quite an amusing moment. How he missed the car I don't know. It was dark, so maybe that was the explanation. It was quite a fun moment. Then after about a week it kind of ratcheted down and they withdrew the car.

*Q: Interesting bit of spice, yes. Toronto the consul general in Toronto had a big consular district covering a good part of, maybe all of Ontario. It sounds like from what you said*

## Library of Congress

*so far, most of your responsibility was supervisory of the visa issuance function. To what extent did you get involved outside of Toronto or in things other than visas?*

RATIGAN: Let me just say this. There is also a very fascinating American citizen side of things and there were other non consular issues I will get to in just a sec, but one of the things you see in Toronto is the tremendous variety and complexity of the relationships between Canadians and Americans, marriages and cross border citizenships. You kind of feel there is every conceivable combination of relationships that could exist. So you get some really unique citizenship problems there, and also problems of American men or women marrying Canadians, how do they get across the border. We had quite a bit of that as well. On the non consular side, I was the number two guy, so I would fill in for John Hall or Mike Durkee at functions but I also tried to do some bit of what reporting I could. There was at that time a new political party developing in the western part of Canada. It was kind of slowly working its way east. They were trying to crack Ontario. Basically western Canada is much more compatible with the United States and sympathetic with the United States. Ontario is probably the least sympathetic of the Canadian provinces.

*Q: You think Quebec is more so?*

RATIGAN: Oh yeah, I do. Certainly the French Canadians in their battles with the English Canadians, they hope that the U.S., they try to treat us very well in hopes that we will not mess with them if they try to break away or that sort of thing. So what was this called. I think it was called the Reform Party. It was coming out of the west, and Prime Minister Mulroney and the Conservatives had really kind of gone down the tubes. President George Bush Senior, George H.W. Bush had come up to Toronto at one point when Mulroney was still in office but still very unpopular. Mulroney's line at the time was, "What do you mean unpopular ? We have a 100% approval rating. He has got 80% and I have got 20%." So anyway out of the ashes of the Canadian conservatives came this Reform party, and a guy named Preston Manning. So I covered that development for awhile. I tried to help John and Mike with some of those things. And of course there is all kinds of lunches and

## Library of Congress

business things that you have to do, so we tried to divvy that up. I certainly didn't do half, but I did a fair number. It is particularly interesting in Canada because the old traditions, in the Toronto area anyway, the old traditions are very strong. When you have a luncheon meeting or you have an honored guest, the group will have gathered in the luncheon room and the honored guest will arrive and will be piped into the room by a bag piper in full regalia and so forth. Pipes blaring, and it is just wonderful theater. Yeah they really do it up right.

*Q: Let me ask a couple more questions if I may. Unless there is something else. I know having worked on things Canadian, I know one of the chronic perennial issues for the embassy in Ottawa and I am sure all of the consulates in Canada is that American officials in Washington or elsewhere in the United States, feel that they know their Canadian counterparts and there is no reason they just can't pick up the phone and discuss something with them. They don't need to go through the embassy or through the Consulate General. They can deal directly. Was that an issue for you or a problem?*

RATIGAN: I am sorry; I don't quite understand.

*Q: Instead of going through the embassy or the consulate they would just deal directly.*

RATIGAN: Who would?

*Q: Well and official in a U.S. government agency in Washington or elsewhere.*

RATIGAN: I think I didn't really run into it too much. There are of course all kinds of things going on some of which, all these cross border commissions. Some of it, I think John and Mike had a handle on some of those, but not all of them, so there was some of that you never quite know what was going on.

*Q: Great Lakes commissions. Boundary commissions.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Yeah Great Lakes, that sort of thing.

*Q: What about I know after 9/11 and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, there is a lot of pre clearance done at Canadian ports, airports and presumably land crossings, so that American immigration and customs officials are located physically in Canada. Had that started when you were in Toronto?*

RATIGAN: Actually it had. There has been quite a history of that for quite awhile. I don't know how long it goes back but certainly at the principal airports of Dorval in Montreal and Pearson in Toronto and the one in Vancouver, that has been going on for decades. I would say a couple of decades at least, that pre clearance process. I think everyone was very happy with it. From the Canadian point of view when you get off that airplane in the United States, you go right to the baggage carousel or you take your bag with you and go right to the taxi. There is no need. But definitely after 9/11 those processes, I am guessing now. I don't really know if they are back. We just heard in the last few days at the Mexican border about cranking up the screening process. They were certainly tightened at that time. Then there was also this initiative between the U.S. and Canada and I think Secretary Rice went up there or maybe it was Powell. There was an effort because the Canadian businessmen were really concerned that they were going to have problems getting access to the United States and they were going to have problems getting stuff in and so forth. They I think, really pressured the Canadian government to say you have really got to work with the Americans to make sure that this cross border movement of material and everything is smooth. So there were all kinds of efforts to work with homeland security and Canadian RCMP and all that to try and get sort of a common policy and make sort of a true North American border so that we would have common policies on the border. How far that ever got I don't know.

## Library of Congress

*Q: When you were there, to what extent did you have responsibility or knowledge or did you coordinate presumably in those days it was immigration, the INS people at the Toronto airport?*

RATIGAN: We talked to them all the time.

*Q: Were they part of the consulate staff?*

RATIGAN: Not really but they were very well established there. There is a western suburb of Toronto called Mississauga. I think most of them lived out in Mississauga. It was pretty close to the airport, but I knew the head of the operation and we would have lunch together every couple of months or something like that. There were a lot of those guys out there, probably 25 or 30 people. It was quite a good number. So we were in regular touch. I think back briefly to the question of admissions into Canada, we always felt, and I think the INS people felt as well, the Canadians were very lenient about who they were letting in. They just had all kinds of people running around there who certainly wouldn't have made it into the United States. So we kind of thought we had to, I mean there wasn't any heightened sense of security at that point or insecurity at that point. We certainly knew there were people out there who would be applying to us for visas who were on our excludable list. How much that has changed I don't really know.

*Q: OK, anything else about your three years in Toronto? Let me ask you one more question about the structure of the consulate general. I assume there was no political officer as such. The consul general and you yourself did whatever political reporting there was to be done.*

RATIGAN: There was a single political econ officer. Len Hill was the guy who was there for the most part while I was there, but also Jack Felt. I think they were both econ officers but they served in that function.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Were there foreign commercial service officers?*

RATIGAN: Yes. Not in the building with us, but they were pretty active, and they were definitely part of a mission. We saw them regularly. I think there was a two man office there of FCS, right down the street from us?

*Q: Did you have a presidential visit? You mentioned President Bush.*

RATIGAN: He came up to go to the ball game with Prime Minister Mulroney. But the Consulate did not have an awful lot to do with the visit.

*Q: In Toronto at the Toronto Blue Jays?*

RATIGAN: Yeah. Actually, we had a lot of consular business with the Blue Jays. David Wells the left handed pitcher was a star on the team, married a Canadian girl. We did all that stuff for his wife's immigrant visa, and of course there were all kinds of visas for Latin and other ball players. So we ended up, a man named Paul Beeston who kind of later became a number two to the Commissioner of baseball was the president of the Blue Jays at the time, and just a wonderful guy and a terrific executive. I think major league baseball was very smart to grab him. Anyway I mean we had so many relationships that when I wanted to go to a game I had to say, "Look Paul, I cannot take free tickets. I need to pay for these." And it got to be a real struggle. But we did interact in many ways. So one time one of my FSNs, she had a very real proper crush on one of the ball players. We asked if we could get an autographed jersey from this guy. His name was Manny Lee. Sure enough we were able to do that and got the autographed jersey. I still hear from that FSN every Christmas.

*Q: She got the shirt.*

RATIGAN: Well she did, and she was a terrific FSN too. But there was more than you would expect of that kind of interaction between us. Oh and I have one wonderful story.

## Library of Congress

We had one of my officers was a man named Lincoln Benedicto who had come out of Cuba in what was called the Peter Pan Brigade when he was about 10 or 12 years old. These were people who were flown out of Cuba at the time of the revolution and were re settled in the United States. So Lincoln ultimately became a foreign service officer. Then in Toronto he was the immigrant visa officer. So every morning Lincoln would go out to the waiting room, and he wouldn't stand behind the glass or he wouldn't talk to them over the microphone. He would simply go out to the waiting room and stand there and his speech would begin something like 30 years ago I was sitting where you are sitting now (as a visa applicant) and I went through this process and tell his whole sort of Horatio Alger story. One day when he did this a reporter from the Globe and Mail happened to be in the waiting room waiting for her immigrant visa. She wrote up the whole thing. It was just a wonderful story. It was a great thing for Lincoln; it was a great thing for us. It was just a great story. Lincoln was a Cuban refugee who came out of Cuba at the about the time of the revolution, and in his youth was a very good baseball player. So when his assignment ended in Toronto he was assigned to the U.S. embassy in Santo Domingo. I don't know quite how the connection was made except that we did have a lot of immigrant visa business with the Toronto blue Jays. One thing led to another and Lincoln became sort of actually sort of a semi official talent scout for the Blue Jays in Santo Domingo. It wasn't too long after that in '92 or '93, I think that the Blue Jays were in the World Series. Some of my friends in Toronto reported that the Blue Jays brought Lincoln back from Santo Domingo and sort of feted him and the other scouts at the time of the world series, taking them to lunch and giving them the congratulatory treatment and everything, which I am sure was just a wonderful moment for Lincoln. So anyway that was kind of an interesting story.

*Q: Got involved in a lot of things, interesting things in Toronto. Anything else about your time in Toronto.*

RATIGAN: I think not.

*Q: Ok in 1992 you were up for reassignment. Where did you go?*



## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I went to Seoul, Korea. I had a good friend who was the incumbent CG there, and it seemed like a natural follow on, a larger section. I had always been fond of the Far East, so I was pleased to be able to get back to the Far East, so off I went to Korea.

*Q: You were a senior officer then.*

RATIGAN: I was.

*Q: did you have Korean language training before you went?*

RATIGAN: I had the so called fast course. A seven week course in Korean, and a brief story if I may. I discovered, we were learning of course the basic forms of conversation and polite address and so forth. I discovered after some weeks of learning how to converse with people in very basic terms the sort of form of address that I was using to people I could only use with about three or four people in the whole country. It was so formal and so highly reserved for senior and august people that I really wasn't going to be able to use this form of address with anyone that I would be normally conversing with. So that kind of put a crimp in the process. But I did learn some things in Korean and it was overall a useful experience in the fast course.

*Q: Was the consular section in Seoul even larger than in Toronto?*

RATIGAN: It was. I think we had I want to say 20 or 21 something like. Quite a few officers including a large number of JO's.

*Q: Many with only rudimentary Korean probably.*

RATIGAN: Oh yes.

*Q: But some with good Korean?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: Well not very many. But we did have one Korean-American whose Korean was basically at the native speaker level. Thank God for him. The department generally didn't make the investment to training people to a good standard in Korean for visa work. They should have. So we used translators. We used FSN's as translators constantly and almost for every officer. Interestingly, we had a junior officer, American but somehow had managed to serve as an intern in the Japanese Diet for I think a year. And so he went over there; he obviously had studied some Japanese before and served as an intern to a member of the Japanese parliament.

*Q: This was an American officer.*

RATIGAN: Yes, a man named Mark Knapper. So he came in with very good Japanese. Since the languages are so close, he picked up Korean really quite readily. He was a language officer who exceeded the performance you would expect. He was really good. Of course he had a lot of Korean girlfriends.

*Q: that would be helpful. Much of the work in the consular section was visas?*

RATIGAN: It was. We were just getting overwhelmed. Koreans they were making a lot of money, and there was a lot of desire to travel. So the volume was in excess of 2,000 every day virtually, probably six to eight months of the year.

*Q: And of the 2,000 roughly what percentage would be non immigrant visas?*

RATIGAN: All non immigrants. We did a good business on the immigrant side too with Korean adoptions and with the large number of Koreans already in the States bringing over relatives. But the 2,000 plus was all non immigrant. So we were trying to build new facilities while at the same time maintaining security. We had a tough go.

*Q: Were you co-located with the rest of the embassy in the chancery?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: We were, yes. The chancery was located in a prime location right very close to the foreign ministry, very close to the prime Korean government buildings. But it was a very old building that was basically in the process of kind of decaying because for years, and it is still going on, there had been this expectation that we were going to swap various parcels of property for a new location where we would build a new chancery. That swap actually came off six or seven years ago after I left. So we got another prime piece of property that was a former boys or girls high school. But when we went to build on that property we were told by the Koreans that skeletons were buried there and it was holy ground. So the whole thing as far as I know is still in limbo. We traded our property but we basically didn't get anything that we could use in return. So now I think the plan may be to build a new chancery out on part of the military base where many of us lived. I lived on the military base which of course was now also quite anachronistic in that it was really not quite in the heart of Seoul but really in the middle of the city.

*Q: You lived on the military base in a government house assigned to you.*

RATIGAN: Yeah. I got a lot of salutes with my grey hair. But that was the point. It was like living in a small Midwestern town in the mid 1950's. You know you had everything right there, the bowling alley, the movie theater, the library, you name it. The military headquarters was located there. They had a wonderful hotel. It couldn't have been much easier as far as living conditions.

*Q: You were the consul general so you rated salutes.*

RATIGAN: The soldiers thought I was military, so even though I was not in uniform, they would just salute to be on the safe side. ....

*Q: So you had a heavy supervisory responsibility with this big section. You also had to relate to the ambassador and DCM. Did you travel a lot or were you pretty much confined to Seoul?*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I didn't travel much for business. I mean we had a consulate in Pusan. They had this wonderful bullet train that went from the north to the south of the country, which we took one time. We went from Seoul to Pusan.

*Q: Did you supervise the principal officer in Pusan?*

RATIGAN: I don't think he was a direct reporting, no not the principal officer. There was a consular officer there that I supervised. I think the principal officer reported to the chief of the political section or DCM perhaps. I would go down there from time to time just to see how things were going, what the problems were and so forth. For private travel we tried to do as much as we could. I am an enthusiastic skier and they had excellent skiing in Korea. They would like to host the winter Olympics in Korea much as they hosted the world cup and the Olympics for that matter several years ago. The mountains are marginal as far as winter goes. They are really not alps type mountains but they could make it. Skiing and snow and stuff is very good, and the facilities by and large are very good.

*Q: You were there from '92 to '95. Did any major events take place during that period?*

RATIGAN: No. What did take place was there was some major concern about a possible invasion from North Korea. The south and the north were going through some particularly difficult times and they were trying to work out the first of the various arrangements about the nuclear facilities and so forth. But tensions were high and we began to make preparations evacuation. I mean Seoul is — from Seoul to the DMZ (the boundary line) is the same as from the U.S. capitol to Dulles Airport. So I mean it is very close. I used to joke that if the North Koreans invaded the first thing they would have to conquer would be a gas station because they would have very little fuel. But I mean nonetheless it was not a joking matter. We began to plan for an evacuation, something I had never done or really been involved with before. Thank God we had the assets of the U.S. military at hand. I and the American citizen services officer, Kathryn Berck, began a series of regular meetings with the military in planning for trains. Basically we had about 10,000 Americans in the

## Library of Congress

Seoul area as I recall, and we were going to put them on trains to the south. We would go and report regularly to the front office about where things stood and what the plans were and so forth.

*Q: This planning related to the American citizen community, not so much to the embassy.*

RATIGAN: Right. A lot of the resident Americans were business people, and of course a big chamber of commerce in Seoul, but also you had people scattered all over the place. You had missionaries still. You had — the military was an unaccompanied tour at that time, but there were a lot of spouses and others who would come over and find their own accommodations, a lot up near the border. Some of them not, because there were U.S. military facilities all over the place. So you have, I suppose it is in any situation, but it was a real mix of people.

*Q: You called it the border. Is that what you called it in those days, or did you call it the DMZ?*

RATIGAN: Well I think the technical term was DMZ, but we regarded it as a border. You know, let me just move on. You would go up to the DMZ and have business up there. One of my jobs, I became the acting DCM for six or eight months. I forget exactly what caused the DCM to leave.

*Q: Well did the DCM leave or was it between ambassadors.*

RATIGAN: The ambassadors, that is what it was. Don Gregg left as ambassador. The DCM became the Charg# and I became the acting DCM. This lasted for quite awhile. So anyway in the course of that we had the first visit outside, we had the first major political visit by President Clinton. He had made a brief visit to Vancouver in the early days of his administration, but his first major overseas visit was to Korea. I don't think they stopped in Japan first. I think they first went to Korea and then went to Japan on the way back.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Was this to attend a conference or a meeting or was it for bilaterals?*

RATIGAN: Bilaterals. They were still in the jogging and pizza days. It was really interesting. I mean as you know this is the first presidential visit I ever handled, and so you are constantly on the phone with the people in the department who run the presidential visits. Nothing we ever did was enough. But it was fascinating in the sense that we set up the visit, and the key event was to be a jog through the blue house grounds, the Korean president's home. Beautiful gardens and what not, and they were both joggers, so they were going to jog and cameras would roll and so forth. So we were all on track planning that and so forth. At just about that time David Gergen came on board at the White House. Well things changed. You could just about hear Gergen saying, "You are going to do what?" Just overnight the jog was off or they were going to take a stroll at some point or other when nobody cared. But the key event was suddenly changed to be a trip to the DMZ and the visual of course was Clinton looking out at North Korea you know with the jacket on or whatever it was. So I spent a lot of time advancing that visit. I have another story to tell you about the accommodations. Let's come back to that. So we spent a lot of time up there kind of advancing that part of the visit. It is a good show. You go up there and there is the line and kind of a Quonset hut that straddles the line and the North comes in on one side and the South comes in on the other. The gendarmes are around looking in the windows with their rifles on their shoulders. Then there is sort of a raised observation platform on the South Korean side. Of course that is where the president was. Well you see these kids up there. On the 2 ID, the second infantry division. Their motto was "Second to none, in front of them all." They were these 18 to 20 year old kids up there in front of everybody. Intentionally so. They were as we always refer to them the trip wire, the guys who were going to get slaughtered if anyone comes across the line. You are up there and you see these kids and you ask, what are we doing? What sense is this? But anyway that is the editorial comment. You know so we spent a lot of time up there. We would take helicopters. The military was running helicopters up there. So I learned a lot up there.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Did you fly along the DMZ in helicopters sometimes?*

RATIGAN: No. You just, Camp Boniface. There are all kinds of camps just strung out along the DMZ. Camp Boniface is the one that is up along the main crossing point. So you just helicopter in there and set down. Everyone is of course, well back from the actual line. There is a bridge that you can actually go down halfway, but nobody ever goes down it because you never know what is going to go on. Of course on the other side you have got these guys in this big, very Stalinist building on the northern side looking out at you. You can see them with their glasses looking at you. There is this huge North Korean flag. It is probably as high and broad as this room that flies from this flag pole on the other side. You think, My God, if the wind dies that thing is going to go straight to the ground. So there is a lot of drama, and the confrontation is drawn more clearly when you actually get up there. So Gergen set things straight and got the president up there, and did all the right things. I am saying Gergen; I am sure that is what happened because the timing is just very clear.

*Q: You mentioned you wanted to say something about accommodations.*

RATIGAN: We, when the visit was first announced, we were talking with the foreign ministry, and the foreign ministry said, "Of course the President will stay in the Shilla Hotel," which is one of the leading hotels in Seoul, and kind of what the government uses for visits. It is not exactly Blair House because it is a private hotel, but they use it a lot. We had already addressed this with the White House and they said, "No we want to stay at the Hyatt. Because when the president gives the speech, we want that Hyatt logo." So the Hyatt was a very nice hotel, a bit out of the way, not right in the heart of downtown. So there was a lot of pulling and hauling about that. The Koreans were really insisting that he stay at the Shilla. The White House and we in the embassy said, "No, we are staying at the Hyatt. We have got it all set up there. The Secret Service has done all of that stuff, the advance work, installing the phone lines, etc." Well I think the president was due to arrive on a Tuesday, and I think the Monday a week before the Tuesday, the boilers blew up in the Hyatt basement at about 6:30 A.M. Of course the White House switch and everybody.

## Library of Congress

There were probably about 70-80 people already at the Hyatt, and the cables all up and down the halls and all that sort of stuff. So it just turned out that the Shilla had 275 empty rooms. So while the Hyatt tried to recover from its misfortunes, almost everybody moved into the Shilla.

*Q: Did the president stay there?*

RATIGAN: The president stayed at the ambassador's residence. So they didn't get quite what they wanted. Then you know, I had embassy officers scattered all over the place during the visit, but two of my best officers were at the ambassador's residence to serve as gophers for whatever the Clintons needed. So after the big dinner, the Clinton's came home at about 11:00. The two, Margaret Farrell and Kin Moy were there. So the Clintons came in and said, "Well let's call out for pizza." So they did. So they sat around. Margaret and Kin and Hillary and Bill were there and sat around and talked until I don't know, 12:30 or 1:00 A.M. It just sounded like a wonderful occasion. My two guys were absolutely thrilled. It was just a smash. I think the visit went off very well. At the end, I wasn't there. But they had a wheels up ceremony the next day. It was a military airfield. Anyway they had Clinton and Hillary and Christopher. Everybody sort of made a speech at the wheels up. My wife said that the order of brilliance was, ascending order, Christopher was the least inspiring. President Clinton was very good and Hillary was just out of sight in her comments and sort of quips and ability to interact with the people there. I had been working with the White House person in charge who was the wife of a guy named Lindsay. I don't remember his first name. He was sort of a grey eminence, the president's behind the scenes in the white House who kind of did some of the tough jobs. But his wife was the White house advance. The two of us were kind of a couple. I just remember we were so delighted. We had our pictures taken, and we sort of hugged each other and said, "Thank God it is over." So I think the whole thing went off fine.

*Q: OK we are continuing to talk about the oral assessment process and how it might be improved.*



## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: I was at the board of examiners in 1995-'96, and was mentioning I thought the actual judging process by the four examiners of the candidates in the round table discussion that forms a key part of the assessment process was a bit too subjective at times. For example, it was quite common among the female examiners in particular, and I think it even spread to the men after awhile, that if a man a male candidate interrupted a woman candidate in the course of her comments or while she was speaking, that male candidate would get marked way down. In the subject areas or the substantive areas that we were assessing in that round table, you would award up to seven points on a particular subject area. But in the case of a man interrupting a woman, he almost always got two out of seven, which really made it hard to pass.

Another situation I recall involved people who don't look like foreign service people. I don't mean in terms of race or ethnicity or any of that stuff, but people who, I am thinking of one in particular. I saw evidence of it elsewhere, but one person in particular we interviewed in San Francisco was big and beefy and short haired buy. He looked like he might have just gotten out of the Marines or might have been a college football player or something like that. I thought that this fellow was one of the best guys we saw the entire week we were there in San Francisco. In his responses I thought he was an excellent candidate. He was sufficiently marked with straight kind of mediocre grades throughout, and I just could never understand why. But I think it was because he just didn't look like us. He didn't look like foreign service people. I think people simply didn't credit what he said and what he did in the same way that they would have credited if his hair had been longer, if his body wasn't as big and he had worn glasses. It was just it still bothers me that there was a lot of things based on rather superficial impressions it seems to me. In another case, I and another male colleague were interviewing, this was a two on one situation. Interviewing a young woman in St. Louis or something like that. She had stretched her legs out like this. Afterward we were told by two of the female examiners that we were just seduced by this woman's long legs and had given her high marks.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Were they present?*

RATIGAN: I don't know. I don't remember exactly how it happened that they saw this situation. I think it is absurd, but the more you deny things like that the more credible it becomes sometimes. But I mean it got to the point where just the best advice it seemed to me and some people asked me for advice later on women — I just told them to wear a pant suit. You know there are things like that that come out that you just cannot anticipate.

One of the other interesting things I suppose, somewhat interesting is that I always thought that people from Georgetown foreign service school were very identifiable. They were very well prepared. They held their hands the same way. Just their actions and I won't say their responses, but their approach to the process was so consistent that you could just pick out people from Georgetown I thought.

*Q: Was that to their advantage or did the examiners kind of discount that because they recognized that they have been approaching the session or had prepared for the session.*

RATIGAN: I think it was to their advantage. I think one of the things that people who take the oral exam most frequently fail on or fail to realize is the importance of listening. In these model demarches in particular but in other exercises as well, what is really being tested is your listening ability and picking up cues from the examiners who are playing the role of foreign ministry people from a foreign country. How well you pick up those cues and then there is an exercise too about how you report what you learned from your demarche back to the head office. I think one of the things the well prepared Georgetown and other students know is that listening is a key element here, and I think the people who come in much colder and not so well prepared just don't realize that often until it is too late.

*Q: The foreign service entry process has changed somewhat in recent times. I think the written examination is being done increasingly on line, being done more frequently. I don't know all the details but my understanding is the structure of the oral assessment process*

## Library of Congress

*is still pretty much the same. Over the last years, certainly at the time you were there, the written examination pass rate was usually about 20-25% as I recall and that the pass rate for the oral was roughly 10%. In other words of those who pass the written and went on to the oral, only one in ten roughly would pass on average. So the oral that is where the real competition is and where people who are otherwise qualified are not going to make it. Is that right do you think from your experience? You have made some specific suggestions, but overall is the oral assessment as you have experienced it produced the kind of junior foreign service officers that we should have?*

RATIGAN: I just always thought it was such a crapshoot. I mean of course the first thing I mentioned was the policy of intentionally not knowing what sort of skills or background the candidate possessed, but that has been addressed, and that certainly is an important thing.

*Q: I think it is better now.*

RATIGAN: I think so, and I am not suggesting that that problem still continues. I just thought the personal qualities and stuff that you were looking for, the functional work related qualities you were looking for, it just seemed to me that the assessment process for those qualities was so unpredictable. I think it was better on the work related functions, the ability to absorb information and give it back. I think the assessing was pretty good there, but on the personal characteristics, boy. I just thought it was so random, far too often unrelated to the basic skills that we were looking for. Did we consistently recognize the top candidates and select them. I certainly didn't think so. And I have people in the field, who were getting some of those people we selected at that time out in the field, tell me that they thought the new officers were a very inconsistent lot. And I certainly had to agree. When I retired from the service and people knew I had been a part of this oral assessment process, and they would ask me how to approach it, and so forth, I would just tell everybody if you don't make it, don't be disappointed. It is just not on merit. I don't think merit comes to the top in that process.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Of course part of the problem is the whole pool that you are dealing with are by and large exceptionally good people.*

RATIGAN: Well I suppose that is right, that by and large the service is getting a high level of people. I think it maybe is not maximizing its opportunities, but it is still such an attractive business to such a large number of talented people. I mean in the ten years I have been consulting for two different high quality, high level law firms, I have probably had seven or eight young lawyers at that time speak to me very seriously about going into the foreign service. One of them has done that. Another one is about to. I have had these furtive lunches with a young man or young woman about ways to basically get out of law and get into the foreign service. So it is still a very attractive business to high level, high talent people. Thank God for that.

*Q: When you would meet with these young lawyers interested in a career change to the foreign service, was one of their questions, "You, John Ratigan were a lawyer throughout your foreign service career. How much difference did that make? In your case, was that something that is possible to combine a background experience as a lawyer and a foreign service officer?" Is this one of the things they were interested in knowing?*

RATIGAN: Not that much. I mean there was some interest in that, but basically these were people who were really ready to chuck the law business and just come in and do the foreign service business, whatever that turned out to be. I will just say briefly, I think law firms just make terrible decisions about the way they handle young attorneys in the sense they try to maximize the revenue from them while paying almost no attention to their sort of retainability, the retaining of these young talented people. So almost everybody is dissatisfied with life at these high pressure high volume firms.

*Q: Do these firms make pretty good decisions about selecting new junior young lawyers. You have talked about selecting new young foreign service officers. How would you say they do? Is it pretty much a crap shoot, because they have a lot of good talent to consider.*

## Library of Congress

RATIGAN: It is hard to know kind of who they select and who they leave out, and who they turn down. But certainly the people that I knew were obviously bright, attractive, very few sort of what we would call nerd like people, people who were without reasonably good social skills. So they do. They do a reasonably good job of selecting who are obviously highly talented people. But in terms of their ability to bring them on to the partner levels, their ability to make those decisions is preempted by the fact that so many of them leave before they actually reach their greatest productivity, that they don't show interest in becoming partners. The process of becoming a partner at these firms is often a contest of how much you can endure. And many of them simply don't want that. I was talking to somebody the other day who went to Carlisle Group; another I know went to Intelsat. I mean all kinds of places where the hours are more predictable, the demands are less than the absurd number of billable hours that they have to generate. So I think that the quality of the people who move from associate to partner is probably overall less than the quality of people who come in as associates.

*Q: OK, you retired in 1997 and for the last ten years or less you have been an immigration consultant with a couple of different law firms. Do you want to say anything about how that works, or is that really beyond the foreign affairs, foreign service context that we are talking about?*

RATIGAN: Well I think during that time I was asked to testify a couple of times before the House Immigration Subcommittee on issues. I think at least one of those occasions was on a matter of some interest or relevance to the State Department. This occasion where I testified was certainly not too long after 9-11. It was in a highly charged political environment when the House was considering taking the visa function away from the department. This was at a time when there were revelations that I think 15 of the 19 Saudis got their visas basically without interview and so forth. So the issue of this hearing was what should we do with the visa function, and should it go to the INS portion of DHS, which had just been created, or what. So I was one of four witnesses who testified at

## Library of Congress

this hearing. My argument was basically there is no body who can do the visa function overseas as well as the young officers of the state department. I said, "They will run through walls for you," which is true, and we all know it. They are just so highly motivated and so intent on moving forward with their career, and a lot of them just get very interested in the work. Some of them just regard it as a bore but I think they do a terrific job of what they have to do which is doing the visa processing at the ground level. So I said that. I think that had credibility. But I also said, indulged one of my sort of pet theories about the immigration process, which is that in the United States we have two organizations that have been charged with the handling of that immigration function. One is the State Department of course which has the overseas side, and then there is the immigration service. We won't get into all the technical names, but the immigration service which handles the domestic side. This is in a direct and significant contrast to the way the visa function is handled in the two other principal immigrating countries in the world, Canada and Australia. The result of that is that in Canada and Australia where you have the functions united in a single bureaucratic entity, you get people who are really knowledgeable about, historians of, thinkers about, philosophers about immigration and how it should be structured and the whole business. I mean I know some of these people, and we don't produce anything like that, any comparable people, in the United States. The reason is that in our structure, we have two bodies, non-thinking bodies you might say, which do the processing work, but neither of which has a head, in the sense of thinking in a policy sense about the problem very much. We have implementers in both sides of the bureaucracy, and we don't develop people who particularly try to think about these problems or step back from them and try to formulate useful policy recommendations. In the 30 plus years that I have been in the business I know one guy like that in the United States. It is unfortunate. I said at the hearing that we ought to try to create more of a single bureaucratic entity, try and unite the two bodies in something or other but have the young junior officers do this kind of work overseas. I don't think I got anywhere with that argument at all. But the net result is that visa policy is generated outside the Executive Branch, either

## Library of Congress

by special interest groups, or by the Congress, often in response to special interests. And I don't think the nation benefits from that sort of structure and policy making system.

*Q: A single immigration agency that would take away conceivably the domestic responsibility for the overseas function from the State Department and put it somewhere else?*

RATIGAN: The effect of what was under consideration in that period after 9/11 would have been to remove the visa function from State and lodge it with DHS, meaning the immigration service. I think my testimony gave them some substantive reasons not to do that, though I am not saying that it was ever very close to coming about. But there was a lot of unhappiness with the State Department's stewardship of the visa function at that time. You no doubt recall that the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs was required to step down at that time, and for that reason.

*Q: It is politics.*

RATIGAN: Unfortunately, there are a few, but certainly not many people thoughtful about immigration up on the hill. So I must say going back to my Senate experience for a time. One of the people that I really had respect for in that area of being thoughtful about immigration in addition to Senator Simpson and Senator Kennedy was Senator Feinstein. She of course, comes from a state where immigration is of tremendous importance and was on the subcommittee when I was there in the 90's, '95 and '96. I always found, and we had a lot of tough issues in the 90's, that Feinstein was always someone you wanted to listen to. She did not come in there with remarks prepared by staffers. She was notoriously tough on staffers. But in the immigration field she pretty much wrote her own stuff, and it was very good. I always made a note of what she had to say because it was very good.

*Q: You just made some interesting observations about the overseas side, junior officers, capable and about the adjudication process, is there anything else you want to say looking back on your five overseas posts, Tehran, Singapore, Cairo, Toronto, and Seoul. In each*



## Library of Congress

*case you did different functions, but you were always a visa officer, whether you were in charge of the section or in Tehran the interviewing officer. There are other aspects of consular work which we talked about some, but I would like anything you would like to say further about the visa role and function as you saw it.*

RATIGAN: You know there are a lot of people in the department who just think the visa function is not important. As part of our diplomatic activities, that we should “facilitate travel” or whatever the euphemism is, that basically means not conducting much of a screen of people coming to the country. I don't share that view. I don't share the view that people ought to be able to immigrate here on the basis of a tourist visa. I was at Barnes and Noble yesterday and just picked up off the new arrivals table a book called, “American Visa” which was the English translation of a book written in Spanish by an author from Peru. I kind of leafed through it. It was very amusing. The book was talking about these visa officers at the embassy in Peru and characterizing these officers very humorously and plotting which one he wants to get interviewed by, and which one he didn't want to get interviewed by and the fact that he was just going in there with totally forged documents. That was, I didn't buy it, but it just shows there are all kinds of people out there who want to immigrate to the United States without any qualifications. I mean I have always said people in this country should see the lines that just go around the block that we all see when we are overseas. Not all those people are just coming as tourists. So I do think it is important. I think that 9-11 has obviously made tremendous changes in the way we do business. Some of them are good. Some of them are overdone. Some of them will be pared back when we finally get back to a sort of normal view of the world. But it has changed. 9-11 has changed the way we go about our business in many ways where we will never go back to the old way. As I say some for better, some for ill.

*Q: I guess one could say the visa officer is the first line of defense. The visa officer sometimes will make a mistake, and someone will be given a visa that does not entirely belong or does not warrant entry. The second line of defense is the immigration officer*



## Library of Congress

*at the point of entry. It is rare. Does it ever happen that the immigration officer will reject someone who has a valid visa?*

RATIGAN: Yeah. I have no idea or sense of how often it happens, but certainly there are people who are turned around at the port of entry. We saw them in Toronto, and heard about them or saw them when they returned at other posts. And I have certainly seen them in private practice. I mean there are enough of them so that there is a generic term called "turnarounds." There is a form that they get and there is a whole bureaucratic process for when people are turned around at the port of entry.

*Q: Now airlines as I understand it can be fined or penalized if they carry someone who doesn't have a valid visa or at minimum they have to take them back to where they have boarded.*

RATIGAN: They get both things. They get a fine when they don't have a valid visa, and they have to take them back to where they came.

*Q: Then there is another whole category who could get in in some other way that don't go through a port of entry across a land border usually. I guess they could come in a sea border as well and just evade the port of entry. But you can't do much about those in terms of visa process.*

RATIGAN: I am sure there is a fair amount of smuggling by sea or by water. When I was in Toronto, we would fairly often hear of illegal aliens picked up in upstate New York after having tried to cross one of the great lakes, or in one of the narrow waterways that connect the great lakes, such as the water just below Niagara Falls. And there was smuggling between Indian reservations that back up to one another, one on the Canadian side of the border and the other on the American side of the border, in upstate New York.

*Q: Let me ask you one other question . To what extent did you feel pressure from say the ambassador, member of Congress, the political office, the head of the political section, to*

## Library of Congress

*issue a visa for somebody who one of your visa officers had decided was ineligible? Did that happen much. Was that a frequent occurrence? Did it happen rarely or at all?*

RATIGAN: One of the lesser reasons I liked Richard Helms a great deal is he said, "I don't do visas." He would get calls from the palace regularly from the Shah's right hand man Mr. Alam, about these issues. He would not touch them. I think all of us who worked in the visa business in Tehran just bought into that. On the other hand his DCM wrote me down in my first efficiency report for not being more malleable about visa issues. You know needless to say I wasn't happy about that. I am sure from his point of view he was right. I issued a lot of cases from the political and economic officers and other people in that embassy. But there is no doubt that there is a regular pulling and hauling process between the political side of the house and the visa side of the house. As I went on in my career I almost got very little pressure on visas except one time in Cairo an embassy officer who I am sure you know well, and his wife were adopting an Egyptian child. There was some problem with the documentation. I like this guy very much, still do, and his wife very sympathetic, but I just felt I cannot sign off on this. I got a call from the ambassador's wife saying, you know trying to intervene. She liked him as much as I did. Shortly thereafter, the next day I got a call from the ambassador saying, "My wife means well, but please don't take this as any effort to put pressure on you or anything like that. He was obviously very conscious of the sort of issues surrounding that sort of thing. We managed to work it out somehow. I know the adopted child was fine and everything went off. But at that point in the process whatever it was, I just felt that I could not sign off on it. But by and large I got very little pressure on visa issues after Teheran. In Korea, I got a call from a senator once, and spent about twenty minutes on the phone with him not a staffer, but the senator himself about a case where we had asked the woman to take a blood test to establish that this child was hers, as I recall. We had strong suspicions that the child was not hers, or we would never have asked for the blood test. I told the Senator that he would not really want me to sign off on a case such as this, where I felt fairly confident that fraud was involved. In the end, he just asked me to do my best, and I don't think the woman ever had the blood test done.

## Library of Congress

*Q: I like Ambassador Richard Helms' position. I was ambassador to Cyprus where visa issuance was not as I recall a major issue that was raised with me. But in Ghana people were talking with me about visas constantly. I took the position that I didn't do visas. There were laws and regulations that the visa officers were implementing and what they did was consummate with that responsibility, and it was not anything that I was going to take an interest in. If somebody with a lot of standing came to me and complained about the procedure in terms of the consular officer being rude allegedly or something like that. If it was somebody I had respect for and I thought was begin serious and not just trying to pressure us, I would then ask the head of the consular section to take a look at this particular case and possibly consider calling the person in for a second interview. But that was the only thing that I would do.*

RATIGAN: We had a rather unusual situation in Seoul where there were efforts to get visa waiver status for Korea.

*Q: Treat it like Western Europe.*

RATIGAN: Right and like Singapore and Japan and so forth. So I was in the department. I had come down from Toronto and was in the department for a couple of months before heading to Seoul, making the rounds and so forth and seeing people. I really expected that somebody, the desk or CA or somebody would talk to me about visa waiver for Korea. I didn't raise it, but I mean I didn't hear anything about it. So when I got out to Seoul I met my officers and got to know everybody. I didn't find out until months later that there were a lot of officers who thought I was coming out there with a mandate to manage the refusal rate down so that it could qualify for visa waiver status. I never would have done that. But as I say it just never came up, but among my officers who were out there, they were convinced that I was there to manage down the refusal rate. As I say nothing was ever said until months later. So there was this inbuilt paranoia among the officers out there. It was a weird situation.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Did Korea qualify for visa waiver status?*

RATIGAN: It didn't. But they could have if the rate had really gone down. The rate wasn't really high. I think it was three or four percent. They could apply if it got down to 2 # or something.

*Q: OK anything else you want to say John, before we finish. It was 24 years in the foreign service from 1973 to '97.*

RATIGAN: I don't think so.

*Q: Ok, well thank you very much. I have enjoyed this and hope that whatever glitch there was on the fourth tape is not going to be a problem to the transcriber or for you.*

End of interview